

TOP STORY: THE RUSSIAN DEVOLUTION

January 23 - February 5, 1995

IN THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

A place called HOPELESS?

Clinton at midterm

Rep. Bernie Sanders

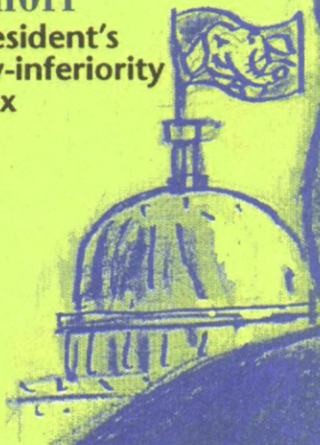
Why he has not yet
begun to fight
page 14

David Brower

Putting the earth first
page 17

Ira Shorr

The president's
military-inferiority
complex
page 20



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E D I T O R I A L

MEXICAN CRISIS NEGATES NAFTA PROMISES

In the bad old days of the Cold War, Soviet and Chinese rulers were faulted for imposing terrible hardship on their people—hardship the Communists claimed was necessary in order to achieve a future life of ease and security for everyone.

Today, the World Bank and the IMF make oddly similar claims as they defend austerity measures that they insist will bring a better life in the by-and-by—if only ordinary workers and small businesspeople will accept steadily declining living standards in the here-and-now.

These austerity schemes have been imposed worldwide. But except for a few corporate giants, 50 years of World Bank and IMF policies have brought misery for just about everyone, everywhere. In Eastern Europe, in countries like Poland and Lithuania where democratic elections are still open and fluid, the harsh reality of these “free market” impositions has resulted in the defeat of the initial democratic reformers and the election to office of former Communists, now “democratic socialists.” In the Third World, where elections are more tightly controlled by the ruling elites, these policies have simply caused increasing misery and, in some cases, incipient threats of insurrection, or, as in Mexico, the beginnings of real insurrection.

The peso's collapse will slow exports to Mexico and lower Mexican wages. For American workers that will mean fewer jobs and increased pressure to keep wages low.

In the United States, Republicans and Clinton Democrats alike have promoted free trade—as defined by NAFTA and GATT—as a panacea for problems of development as well as profitability. In their campaign to ratify NAFTA, Clinton and his Republican allies presented Mexico as a model of modernization in the World Bank/IMF mold. But the collapse of the peso, and with it the facade of government credibility, has

dealt a heavy blow to the myth that domestic austerity and export-based development are beneficial not only to investors, but also to ordinary workers and small business owners.

The Mexican crisis occurred because the peso was pegged to the dollar at the artificially high rate of three to one. This made imported goods cheap and exports pricey, which resulted in a trade deficit of nearly \$30 billion in 1994, the biggest trade imbalance in Mexico's history. The trade deficit, in turn, led to a draining of Mexico's foreign currency reserves from some \$25 billion to \$6.5 billion, barely enough

to cover two months of imports.

This situation was hidden from the public as best it could be by the outgoing regime of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. But when Mexico's new president, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, took office in December things rapidly unraveled. Zedillo was forced by events to allow the peso to trade freely, and it promptly lost half of its value, falling to nearly six to the dollar.

This, of course, caused panic on Wall Street, and especially among the U.S. holders of \$30-35 billion in Mexican stocks, government bonds and other peso-based interest-bearing securities who saw the value of their holdings cut nearly in half overnight. In turn, the Zedillo administration was forced to scramble in order to pacify the U.S. investors, who own \$45-50 billion of the \$73 billion in foreign investment in Mexico, and who have been seen as the motor of the Mexican miracle.

So Zedillo did his duty. He announced a new program of austerity in which growth will be lowered from 4.5 percent a year to 1.5 percent, inflation will soar to 19 percent, up from 7 percent in 1994 and from the previously projected 4 percent rate for this year. Profitable government-owned businesses will be offered for sale, and workers will be held to a 7 percent increase in actual wages, or to a substantial cut in real wages in 1995, and presumably beyond.

The purpose of all this is to boost Mexican exports and to reduce their imports. But NAFTA was sold to the American people on the theory that it would increase employment here—despite the loss of jobs to maquiladoras—because American exports to Mexico would grow rapidly. Now, the opposite is true.

Further, we were assured, Mexican wages would go up as a result of expanded free trade, and the consequent new demand for labor in Mexico. But now growth will be slowed and real wages will fall even more rapidly, thereby putting pressure on American workers seeking increased pay at home.

In short, we have been sold a bill of goods. As in all the recent World Bank/IMF development plans, the net result may be higher corporate profits, but the vast majority of the population both in the target country and the United States will suffer declines in real income and in power over decisions that affect their lives.

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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InTHESETIMES

CONTENTS

Volume 19, Number 5

A place called HOPELESS?

REP. BERNIE SANDERS
offers the president some friendly advice

14

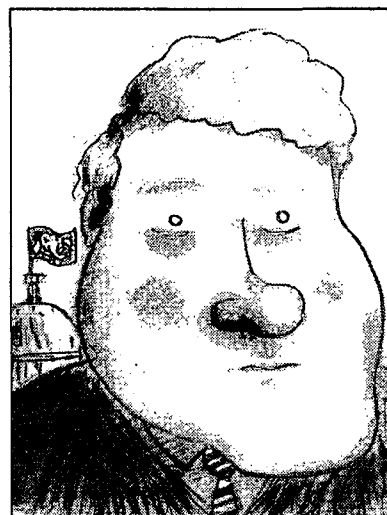
DAVID BROWER
*on the administration's
 environmental disaster*

17

IRA SHORR
*on the president's
 military-inferiority complex*

20

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The Russian devolution

*Yeltsin takes his country to
 the brink in Chechnya*

FRED WEIR

30

FEATURES

- First Stone: Working in opposition • Joel Bleifuss.....12
 Defense conversion and economic democracy • David Moberg.....24
 Civil rights politics in a post-civil rights world • Salim Muwakkil28

REVIEWS

- Film: The subtle shades of *Red* • Pat Dowell32
 Books: Soul men • Mark Gauvreau Judge34
 My dear Watsonville • Paul Buhle36

DEPARTMENTS

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|----|
| Letters | 4 | Tomorrow's News • Steve Brodner..... | 9 |
| Sylvia • Nicole Hollander | 4 | In Person • Paul Hockenos..... | 10 |
| In Short | 6 | Etc. • Jim McNeill..... | 10 |
| Appall-O-Meter | 6 | Huge Mouth • Peter Hannan..... | 13 |
| Media Beat • Pat Aufderheide | 8 | Classifieds | 37 |

LETTERS

Fairy tales

I am a longtime fan of Doug Henwood's work and agree with most of his comments in "The austerity police" (*ITT*, December 12). But in stating that "we are now at the point where inflation has traditionally begun" he concedes too much to Alan Greenspan.

The six interest rate increases over the last year have been rationalized by Greenspan's reference to a purported historical "lesson," i.e., when we allow labor markets to get too tight, wages will rise and start an inflationary spiral. This is a myth; at no time in this century has a slowly growing peacetime economy set off inflation by pressuring capacity. In fact, the Consumer Price Index has never gone beyond 5 percent other than as a result of war or sudden unexpected international commodity shortages, such as the oil price shocks of the 1970s.

Currently, there is even less reason to be taken in by Greenspan's fairy tales. The U.S. economy over the last decade has proven extraordinarily resistant to inflation. Deregulation and the growing production capacity of low-wage Third World countries make it much harder for producers to raise prices and make them stick.

In any event, a little more inflation would be a small price to pay for tightening the labor market a few notches in order to put more people to work and maybe even force employers to bid up wages a few cents.

Henwood's got my vote for an overhaul of the economy. In the meantime, let's not let the Federal Reserve off the hook.

Jeff Faux
President

Economic Policy Institute
Washington, D.C.

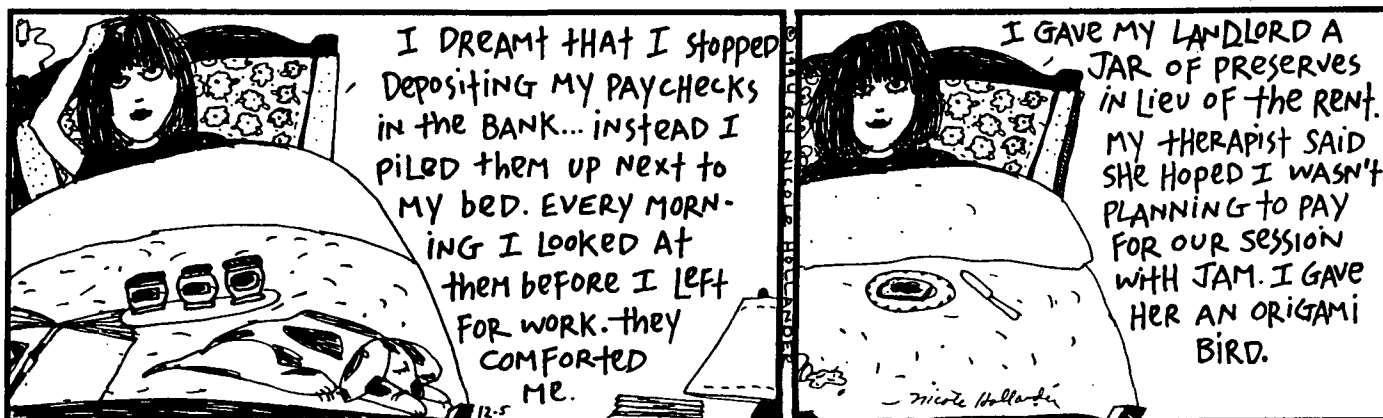
"Just do it!"

Joel Bleifuss stepped into deep weeds, apparently without a compass, in his article on campaign finance reform (*ITT*, December 12). Contrary to the assertions of John Bonifaz, Randy Kehler and Ellen Miller, the Center for a New Democracy is now, and has been since its founding, committed to the public financing of elections. The only substantial difference with these folks is that we have joined with people and organizations—most notably the Public Interest Research Groups, ACORN and state chapters of Common Cause, the League of Women Voters, United We Stand America and the American Association of Retired Persons—to do something to move toward that goal. The success of this grass-roots alliance was most evident in recent referendum victories in D.C., Montana, Missouri and Oregon—aimed at driving private money out of politics and restoring elections to the control of ordinary citizens. As evidenced by our work, we are committed to moving beyond rhetoric.

What your readers were handed as news and analysis is just another turf war—in this case, one-sided, as we've repeatedly sought alliance with the Bonifaz/Kehler/Miller faction—among progressives committed to the same goal. If our resources were greater, this argument among ourselves would merely be preposterous and stupid. But, given scarce resources and the abundance of real enemies, it is dan-

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



gerous and counterproductive to achieving a common goal. In the words of some Madison Avenue genius, stop talking and "Just Do It!"

Donna F. Edwards
Executive Director
Center for a New Democracy
Washington, D.C.

Joel Bleifuss replies: Edwards says, "Just do it." Yet the question remains, "Do what?" In my column I explored which strategies might lead to meaningful campaign finance reform. I was not engaging in "just another turf war." And I do not believe that such a discussion is "preposterous" or "counterproductive."

The Center for a New Democracy (CND) and its stepsister, the New Party—which share a founding father in Joel Rogers, the University of Wisconsin-Madison political scientist—are both committed to pursuing \$100 limits. While the New Party does not have a position on public funding of elections, the CND, according to Edwards, supports full public financing. Yet if the CND is committed to government-funded elections, one would expect that its literature would mention such a commitment. It does not.

Although the CND has done important work in exposing the flaws in the current campaign finance system, there are also significant flaws in its own strategy. Edwards points proudly to the recent passage of \$100 limits in D.C., Montana, Oregon and Missouri. But the Missouri measure and another \$100-limit law in Minnesota have been successfully challenged in federal court.

In Missouri, federal Judge Russell Clark recently issued an injunction barring the state's law from taking effect, saying, "The campaign-contributions limits restrict plaintiffs' freedom of expression and of political association." Unlike the CND's \$100 limits, the public financing proposals supported by John Bonifaz, Randy Kehler and Ellen Miller are constitutionally tested and avoid these legal pitfalls.

Finally, Edwards says, "We've repeatedly sought alliance with the

Bonifaz/Kehler/Miller faction." Bonifaz calls that statement "specious." Bonifaz says that he, Kehler and Miller attended a two-day meeting last February with CND leaders Edwards and Rogers. "For whatever reason," says Bonifaz, "the Center for a New Democracy has chosen not to broaden its tent to include advocates for public financing. Instead, we see a lot of people focusing on the short-term bottom-line strategy of getting a win." And, he adds: "If it is not good to air dissenting views, I'm sorry but I don't understand. A democracy campaign with no dissent, what is that about?"

Table manners

As Rob Osler's letter (ITT, November 28) eloquently demonstrates, not all members of one target group (in this case, gay men) are automatically sensitive to (or even conscious of) issues facing members of other target groups (e.g., women, immigrants, people of color, poor people).

Many on the left begin with the assumption that our membership in one target group (or in left politics itself) magically renders us sensitive to the oppression of those in other target groups. This assumption is simply incorrect. A gay white man is just as capable of racism as any other white person. The fact is, progressive politics that focus on one area do not automatically translate to others.

How many of us, like Mr. Osler, believe that "coalition-building" means educating others on our issues? How many of us are so busy fighting for "A Place at the Table" for ourselves that we don't care who else is excluded? As we fight with each other for tiny slices of the American pie, the right wing (which indiscriminately targets gay people, the poor, people of color, women and immigrants) continues its work unimpeded.

In these troubled times, can we find it in ourselves to truly support each other in our common struggle?

Michelle Golden
Joseph Fernandez
Atlanta

All out

Rob Osler's letter in reply to my essay ("Out there," November 14) is right: the one-on-one communication that confronts anti-gay bigotry and disproves stereotypes is the most important work homosexuals do—individually. But my essay was about collective action, and, in particular, about the already progressive gay community's stated desire to build coalitions and its failure to do so. Non-progressive homosexual groups like the Republican Log Cabin Club and individuals like Bruce Bawer and Mr. Osler help fight homophobia by being out of the closet, but they contribute little to organized gay activism.

While there is nothing about our sexuality that predisposes us toward leftism, one would hope that the suffering imposed on us for not conforming to heterosexual "norms" might make us sensitive to the oppression of others and help us understand that our grievances are part of a larger social justice movement, whether we like it or not.

Why is it that we gay activists who are most accused of defining ourselves "solely by sexual orientation" are so often the most willing to involve ourselves in other people's concerns? Because we understand that we'll never see a national law protecting us until we become part of a progressive movement that seeks to address the needs and rights of all Americans.

In fact, I don't narrowly define myself by my sexual orientation—I simply describe myself. The goal of queer liberation includes the destruction of imposed conventions and petrified categories. Whether one wears leather, drag or Brooks Brothers suits—and whether one loves men or women or a single partner or many: such things are less the issue than whether one is obliged to wear something or to conduct one's love life a certain way.

Scott MacLarty
Washington, D.C.

InSHORT



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VENEZUELA BANKS ON DISASTER

While the rest of the world bows down before the World Bank, Venezuela is lining its bankers up against the wall. Last month, at the end of a year of turmoil and scandals that have brought Venezuela's banks to the brink of collapse, the pro-government Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) held mock trials for some 20 top Venezuelan bankers who had fled the country. The MAS campaign, which featured "Wanted" posters detailing the bankers' alleged frauds and pillagings, crystallized a sense of revulsion found

Venezuelan President Rafael Caldera



The lowest learning

The Chicago Board of Education is mounting a curious defense against a lawsuit filed on behalf of a 9-year-old



Chicago girl who was forced to perform oral sex on a classmate under a

desk while a substitute teacher sat obliviously reading a book. Investigators from the board are placing the blame for the incident on ... the girl herself. "Any injuries sustained occurred by [the girl's] negligent failure to exercise ordinary care" by crying for help, the board concluded.

Steal this book

A South African student arrested for shoplifting claims to have been inspired by Nelson Mandela, according to the Associated Press. After observing the success of Mandela's bestselling *Long Walk to Freedom*, a memoir of his years in jail, Michael Dladla decided he wanted to try his hand at prison literature as well. "Dladla told the court



he saw Mandela talking on television about his years in prison on

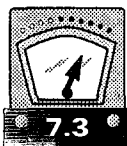
terrorism charges and decided to try to get to jail also," the AP reports.

Newt Dealing

Long before his multimillion-dollar book deal incited a scandal in the press, Newt Gingrich proved himself an

innovative fund raiser. According to one Gingrich supporter quoted recently

by the *New York Times*, when the speaker was a history professor at West Georgia University in 1971, he asked each of his students to donate five dollars a week to his campaign fund "in the interest of good government."

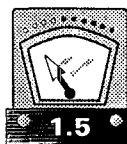


Heaven and hell

A unique perspective on crime and punishment, taken from the text of a statement issued by John C. Salvi III, accused of gunning down

two abortion clinic workers in Massachusetts: "If convicted of the charges I am

accused of, I wish to receive the death penalty. After proceedings are through, I wish to have an interview with Barbara Walters within the year. ... If I am not proven guilty, upon release I will become a Catholic priest."



APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Models Inc.-redible!
2. Infomercial irritating
3. Plausibly deniable
4. L.A.P.D. blue
5. Bob Dole-idious
6. Raoul Cédras-tic
7. Ollie North nasty
8. Holiday in Rwanda
9. Zhdanovskyesque
10. Where have you gone, Joe Goebbels?

throughout Venezuelan society, where the word "banker" has become a generic term of abuse. And as the focus of the controversy widens beyond a few corporate executives to encompass the entire financial system, it threatens the whole neoliberal project of deregulation and privatization.

The scandal came to the fore in February of last year when Rafael Caldera became president and was greeted with one of the most severe banking crises in Venezuela's history. To head off a wave of bank failures, the government bailed out eight banks by granting them virtually interest-free loans. Half a year and \$6 billion later, the government had taken over these eight along with three others that were on the brink of collapse; five of them were among the 10 largest banks in Venezuela.

The government justified the bailout as a necessary move to safeguard depositors' accounts, but much of the money wound up lining the bankers' pockets instead. Banks received nearly three times as much money as they owed to depositors; but a great deal of it seems to have evaporated when, just prior to the takeover, some bankers simply converted their banks' bolivars into dollars—hundreds of millions in all—that they sent abroad. Upon probing the banks' records, the Attorney General's office discovered that much of the property the banks put up as collateral on the government loans had been wildly overvalued.

In retaliation for these scams, in mid-October Caldera issued Decree 383, which authorized the state to seize all property put up by the insolvent banks as guarantees for government loans. The decree also allows the state to take over any company that had received unsecured loans from the banks. These debtor companies are suspected of having been owned by the very bank officials who certified the loans, a blatantly illegal practice. More recently, the government has begun auctioning off hundreds of companies and properties linked to the banks. And in early December, arrest orders were issued for 20 executives of the Banco Barinas, accused of publishing false commercial balances and illegally authorizing credits.

These events have radically transformed Venezuela's political climate. For the first time in history, the head of state has openly lashed out at the economic elite. The government's crackdown has struck a responsive chord among many sectors of society. Caldera was applauded by some members of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce during a speech in which he denounced the banking community as "a Mafia which took advantage of the deposits of clients in order to amass an impressive fortune." Many businessmen blame the bankers for diversifying away from their traditional money-lending activities and into farming, tourism and other industries in which they had no expertise. But Caldera's decision to confront the bankers head-on by expropriating their assets sends shivers down the spines of most members of the business community. The takeover of banks and other companies propels the government into direct management of the economy in a way that violates sacred precepts of free-market capitalism. As the newspaper *Diario di Caracas*, put it: "Today it is the property of the [banks], tomorrow it can be anything."

Businessmen's paranoia is made more understandable by Caldera's suspension of major constitutional guarantees, thus freeing the state to forcibly enter homes, impede travel and expropriate property without due process. Although he adamantly denies that democracy is under threat, Caldera has hinted at the possibility of dissolving the Venezuelan legislature, which opposed Decree 383. When asked what obstructing travel and entering homes have to do with banks, one Caldera supporter explained that, "Exiled bankers won't dare return to Venezuela surreptitiously," adding that the government can "clamp

down on commercial speculation, delinquency and violent protests, which the bankers could easily exploit in order to undermine our democracy.”

Caldera was elected in December of 1993 on a platform of selective “intervention” in the economy, beating two major rivals who embraced neoliberalism. He has insisted that the government play a vigorous role in the economy. His conservative opponents now use the term “interventionist” to lump together his politicized campaign against the banking system, more general economic regulation like price and exchange-rate controls, and the suspension of constitutional safeguards—as well as Caldera’s general rhetorical opposition to neoliberal nostrums. While these critics have called for the prompt restoration of the suspended constitutional liberties, their main point seems to be that an attack on the neoliberal agenda is synonymous with an attack on democracy itself. Whether Venezuelans as a whole agree with that proposition remains to be seen.

—Steve Ellner

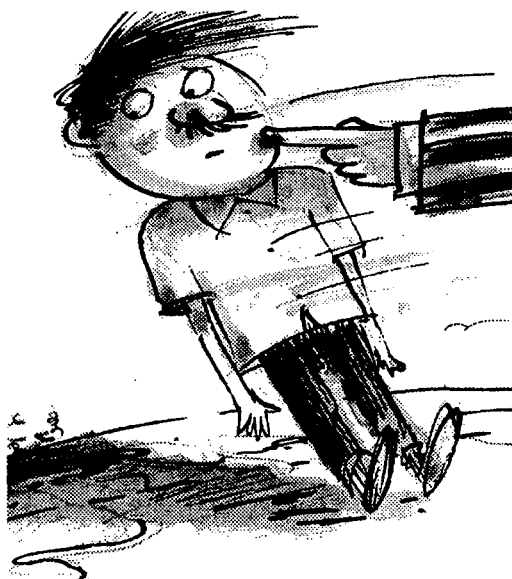
(Steve Ellner is the co-editor of *The Latin American Left: From the Fall of Allende to Perestroika*, which was published by Westview Press in 1993.)

HIT THE ROAD, JUAN

The anti-immigrant backlash spurred by California’s Proposition 187 has claimed its first victims: 200,000 refugees seeking shelter from repression and social upheaval in El Salvador. In early December the Clinton administration ended a program that accorded special refugee status to 200,000 Salvadorans living in the United States. The amnesty program, which was established in 1990, allowed the refugees to live and work here without fear of deportation.

The move could devastate El Salvador. The country’s economy, shattered by a decade of civil war, depends on remittances from some 2 million Salvadorans living abroad, more than 1 million of whom live in the United States (800,000 of these are permanent residents or are here illegally). Remittances from the United States will top \$825 million this year, more than double the earnings El Salvador gets from coffee, the nation’s largest export. These remittances mainly benefit the poor, providing a cushion for those hardest hit by IMF-mandated austerity programs. In effect, Salvadorans working at low-wage jobs in the United States provide some desperately needed economic stability to their homeland.

The amnesty program was originally prompted by the pervasive human rights abuses committed by the Salvadoran military and police against their political opponents. But the Clinton administration now contends that the human rights situation in El Salvador has “improved significantly” and that amnesty is no longer warrant-



MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

Free enterprise?

Public television looks like an early target of Republican wrath, what with Newt Gingrich denouncing the institution on C-SPAN as “a bunch of rich, upper-class people who want their toy to play with” and threatening to zero out the Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s appropriations.

He contrasted public television with C-SPAN itself, the private cable network that broadcasts congressional proceedings and other public affairs programs, offering this encomium to C-SPAN head Brian Lamb: “You went out as an entrepreneur, you sold the cable industry into putting on its own channel ... and you’ve gotten people to watch because they like it. And we don’t give you \$100 or \$200 million a year.”

Well, it depends how you count it. C-SPAN was created as part of a deal between the cable industry, the cities and Congress. The 1984 Cable Act gave cable a virtual monopoly; most subscribers have no choice of cable companies, and those companies program virtually all the channels.

The cable companies exploited the situation so grossly that within six years consumers revolted against high prices, bad service and cabling’s contemptuous treatment of public access channels. But not even the 1992 Cable Act, which feebly reintroduced some regulation, could undercut cable’s monopoly. The cost to the public of bad cable policy is arguably far higher than federal appropriations to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The limits of public-interest entrepreneurship in the cable industry are highlighted by the fact that C-SPAN II is carried by far fewer systems than is C-SPAN I. In fact, since 1992, C-SPAN has disappeared altogether from some systems.

Enterprising public TV

As public broadcasting executives try to convince the Republicans not to pull the plug on their funding, they are handicapped by public broadcasting's murky image. "Public" broadcasting is a private institution, funded mostly by corporate and individual donations. Power is held at the local level, by the 350 TV and 550 radio stations that use federal funds. At most of them, the relentless seduction of prospective middlebrow members and corporate "underwriters" is a tawdry but inescapable fact of life. And almost everywhere—especially at stations located at universities, which are universally facing fiscal crisis—there are money troubles.

So it's getting harder and harder to draw the line between public and private. Take the latest gossip from New York's leading public TV station, WNET. The station's studios, representing a substantial public investment built up in sunnier times, are now a financial albatross, having proved too expensive for the likes of the (now part-TCI owned) *MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour* and the *Charlie Rose Show*. One possible solution, bruited about in *Variety*: oily tabloid talk show host Montel Williams is considering moving his show to the studios.

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ed. Leaders from the Salvadoran community, however, point to a recent rash of abuses.

"The army still gets away with murder," says Mario Davila, a Salvadoran who works with the American Friends Service Committee in Boston. While the 1992 peace accords that ended El Salvador's 12-year civil war reduced the army's power, the threat of repression remains. Davila cites a mid-November incident when soldiers opened fire on demonstrators during a bus operators' strike, killing four. And right-wing death squads continue to strike at opposition political leaders. On November 10, David Merino, head of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front's land commission, was gunned down in a San Salvador restaurant. United Nations peacekeepers recorded 40 "arbitrary executions" in the first half of 1994.

Faced with opposition from Salvadoran activist groups in the United States and protests from the Salvadoran government, the Clinton administration is backing away from immediate deportations. The Immigration and Naturalization Service officially ended the special refugee program, but extended work permits for nine months and insisted that any implementation of punitive measures would be "delayed and gradual." Still, these are anxious times for Salvadoran refugees—the threat of deportation is postponed, but not ended. El Salvador's Bishop Rosa Chavez compares the situation to "when someone is given the death penalty: they are given a grace period but they are still condemned to die."

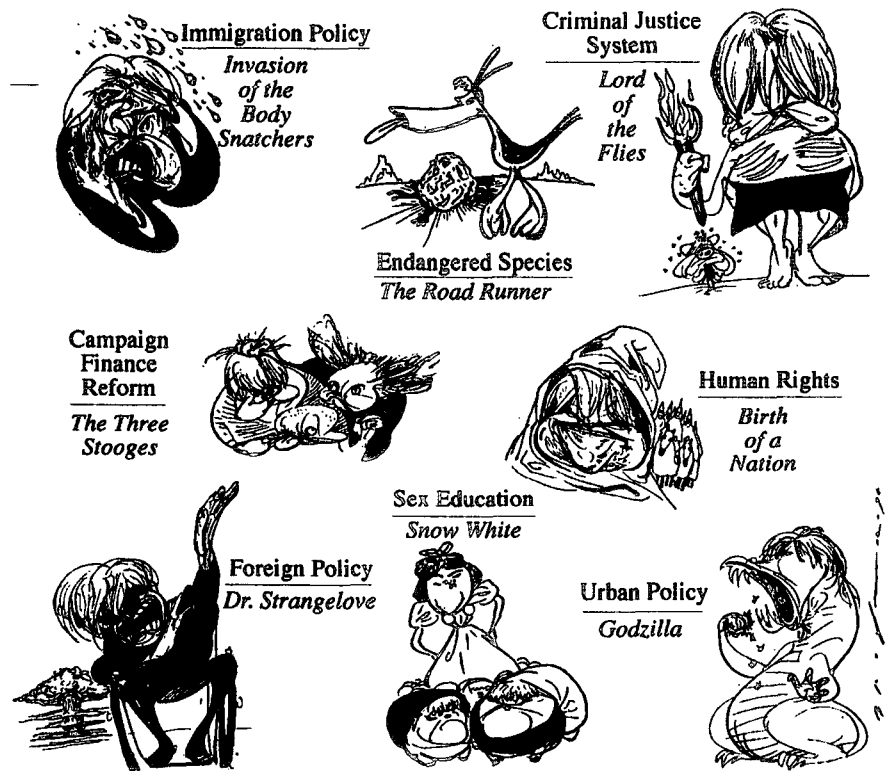
—Michael Zielinski

Tomorrow's News Tonight

By Steve Brodner

Newt in the Movies

Films at the Core of the GOP Agenda:



By Jim McNeill

AFTA-math

With the peso continuing its free fall, it's hard to believe that just last month the Clinton administration was pointing proudly to Mexico as a model of economic development for Latin America.

In early December, as administration officials descended upon Miami for the Summit of the Americas, they stressed the role that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had played in strengthening the economies of both Mexico and the United States.

In fact, according to President Clinton, NAFTA had worked so well since its implementation last January that he believed all of the national leaders attending the summit should join him in establishing a free-trade zone stretching from "Alaska to Argentina" by the year 2003. Referred to as the American Free Trade Agreement, or AFTA, the idea went over well with almost everyone—except for the Brazilian delegation, which disconsolately noted that "afta" is the Portuguese word for an open sore in the mouth. In deference to Brazil's indelicate objection, U.S. officials diplomatically agreed to begin referring to the proposed accord as the Free Trade Area of the Americas, or FTAA.

Unfortunately, while U.S. officials were scrupulously concerned about linguistic conventions at the summit, they weren't nearly so careful with the statistics they used to buttress their free-trade arguments.

During a December 11 interview with a reporter from WTVJ, NBC's Miami affiliate, Commerce Secretary Ron Brown boasted that there had

I N P E R S O N**THE POPE'S MAN
IN SARAJEVO**

*Vinko Puljic's
multicultural Catholicism*

It was with hometown pride that Muslims, Croats and Serbs in Sarajevo boasted of Archbishop Vinko Puljic's good relations with Pope John Paul II. Many viewed the pope's planned visit to Sarajevo last September as a stamp of approval for Puljic's work for peace, tolerance and multicultural coexistence in Bosnia-Herzegovina. While the pope canceled his trip for security reasons, his intention to visit Sarajevo first and only then afterwards to go to Zagreb, the Croatian capital, was seen as a sign that the pontiff stood behind both Puljic, as well as a sovereign, independent Bosnian state.

Yet everyone in Sarajevo, including those in Puljic's closest circle, was surprised when the announcement came last fall that Puljic would be named cardinal. The decision was unexpected because there is already a Croat cardinal in what once was Yugoslavia. The head of the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia is Cardinal Franjo Kuharic, who, since the country's independence in 1990, has tacitly backed the nationalist Croatian government.

Bosnians hail Puljic's appointment as a pointed rebuke of Croatian nationalists. "This is clearly going to strengthen the liberal wing of the church," said one

It was with hometown pride that Muslims, Croats and Serbs in Sarajevo boasted of Archbishop Vinko Puljic's good relations with Pope John Paul II. Many viewed the pope's planned visit to Sarajevo last September as a stamp of approval

been a net increase of 100,000 U.S. jobs thanks to the new trade generated by NAFTA. Although that's an impressive figure, it also happens to be fictitious.

Sarah Anderson, a researcher at the Institute for Policy Studies who has closely followed the trade agreement's impact, noted that reliable studies show that NAFTA has been responsible for a net decrease in U.S. jobs. A study by the Joint Economic Commission of the U.S. Congress released in November estimated that the United States lost a net of 10,000 jobs due to NAFTA's implementation.

So how did the commerce secretary come up with his figure? Anderson says Brown improperly lifted the 100,000-new-jobs statistic from a Commerce Department report detailing U.S. export growth. Although that report did estimate the number of U.S. jobs created due to the increase in overall American exports to Mexico, it did not determine whether the new jobs could be attributed to NAFTA's passage. Nor did it include any information on the number of U.S. jobs that might have been lost by American companies moving south of the border.

Even the Commerce Department's chief economist, Lewis Alexander, admitted that Brown's massaging of the department's statistics was suspect. "We never ascribed that [100,000] number to NAFTA," Alexander told *In These Times*. "We don't know what portion of those increased [jobs] can be properly ascribed to NAFTA." As Alexander noted, "in our materials we were careful to make the distinction that this was not an estimate reflecting the effect of NAFTA."

German diplomat in Sarajevo. "It appears that Bosnia has the pope's blessing."

Even before the onset of war, the 49-year-old Banja Luka-born Puljic was an outspoken proponent of both Bosnian territorial integrity and the viability of a common multinational state including Serbs, Muslims and Croats. Until the outbreak of war in 1992, Croats made up 17 percent (about 800,000 people) of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Most came from the ethnically mixed regions in central Bosnia. Only in west Herzegovina did the 170,000 Croats comprise the majority.

"Bosnia-Herzegovina is a historical reality," says Cardinal Puljic. Sitting in his parish office in downtown Sarajevo, with a giant map of 16th-century Bosnia behind his desk, he explains that Bosnia's different cultures, nationalities and religions are its strength and the basis of the Bosnian identity. "It would be a grave injustice to divide Bosnia into national states," he says. According to Puljic, the intention of the international community to partition Bosnia has justified ethnic cleansing, mass expulsions and war crimes. "Bosnia is a viable state as long as the majority doesn't have more rights than the minority."

Puljic maintains that the return of refugees to their original homes is a precondition for lasting peace in the region. Repatriation will be especially important for the Bosnian Croats, 350,000 to 400,000 of whom have been expelled or displaced from their residences.

In contrast to west Herzegovina's Bishop Peric, Puljic has sharply criticized Croatian motives for backing west Herzegovina's Croat extremists in the 1993-94 war against the Bosnian Muslims. Church insiders say that Puljic, with the support of John Paul, prodded Cardinal Kuharic to distance himself from the nationalists' aims and finally admonish the nationalists publicly with a famous open letter in May 1993.

Unfortunately, that intervention came too late. Before west Herzegovina chauvinists fanned nationalist passions in central Bosnia, most Croats living there referred to themselves not as "Croats" but simply as "Catholic Bosnians." Although the extremists lost their own war, they succeeded in nationalizing the central Bosnian Catholics and thereby destroying multicultural society.

But Puljic's critique of Croatian nationalism and the church's role in Croatia also has its limits. "The Catholic Church stands solidly behind democracy, and where the state fails to abide by democratic principles, the church must react," he says. However, he refuses to acknowledge the authoritarian nature of the ruling government in Croatia or the dangers inherent in the brand of ethnic nationalism that it endorses.

"This is typical of the Catholic Church throughout history," said a renowned sociologist of religion from the Croatian city of Split, who asked that his name be withheld for security reasons. "The church hierarchy may criticize the powers that be, but it always stops short of political engagement when it's not in its own interests. If the church operates unhindered, then it will come to terms with the state, whether it's democratic or not."

Cardinal Puljic hopes that once the war is over it will be possible to revitalize the Bosnian identity and the former tolerance of diversity. The longer the war continues, the more entrenched radical politicians and their assumptions become in society. But at the moment, he admits, a speedy end to the war seems a long way off.

—Paul Hockenos

THE FIRST STONE

WORKING IN OPPOSITION

By Joel Bleifuss

The Democratic Party is at a crossroads. Some party leaders, testing the winds of conventional wisdom—perhaps getting a whiff of some corporate greenbacks—say, “Follow those Republicans.”

“We can do a lot of business together,” President Clinton declared after his first meeting with the new Speaker of the House, indicating that the two share more than a bulging waistline.

Other party figures, possessed of a surer moral compass and a fuller understanding of American politics, realize that the only way Democrats can regain lost ground is to expose the Newtoids as the civic charlatans they are. And that’s just a beginning.

“A strong, progressive, populist politics is in order,” says Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-MN). “Progressive forces need to galvanize around, rally around, a strong opposition that offers alternatives that make a difference to ordinary people. It is extremely important that we confront the Republicans with a grass-roots politics that is populist in its tone. If there is any silver lining in the clouds, it is: if not now, when?”

Even if the president is intellectually able to understand the merits of Wellstone’s argument—and remember Clinton was a crusading reformer back in the ’70s—today he is in some ways powerless to alter course. During the 1992 presidential primaries, Democratic Party sugar daddies and the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), a group of business-minded Democrats established in 1985 to halt the party’s supposed leftward drift, put their money on the able, young and moderate governor from Arkansas. That conservative corporatist faction of the party is Clinton’s core constituency, and he is beholden to them.

The president’s political allegiances will become more transparent once he fills a key political vacancy—the White House director of political affairs. After the election, former political affairs director Joan Baggett left the White House for a job with the International Masonry Institute.

Clinton has already turned to one of Washington’s most versatile, and amoral, corporate lobbyists, Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, to head up his re-election commit-

tee. And he has named Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) to chair the DNC, replacing David Wilhelm, who resigned soon after the election. Dodd will keep his Senate seat, and the DNC’s day-to-day operations will be run by South Carolina state committeeman Donald Fowler, a party moderate.

Though Wilhelm received much of the blame for the Democrats’ November drubbing, his supporters in Washington insist that Wilhelm tried to reinvigorate the party’s grass roots by reaching out to the Democratic county chairs. They argue that Wilhelm signed the checks at the DNC but did not have final say on the party’s national program. Those decisions

were left to White House officials. A DNC official and Wilhelm partisan lamented: “It’s hard when we get the blame when things go wrong when they [at the White House political affairs office] are the ones calling the shots. Wilhelm was a fall guy, he took the fall for the White House.”

At the White House the shots were being called by a number of operatives, including former political affairs director Baggett, Harold Ickes, the deputy chief of staff for policy and political affairs, and political “volunteer” Tony Coelho, the one-time California congressman whom the White House recruited in August to run its political operation.

Coelho was brought on board to manage the president’s political affairs on a voluntary basis. He had earlier turned down offers for a formal position in the administration because he was unwilling to give up his job as CEO of an investment banking firm that serves clients whose names he refuses to disclose. “The Naders of this world want to say there are conflicts [in my position],” he told the *New Republic*’s Ruth Shalit. “And I think they’re crazy.”

Recall that in 1989, Coelho, then the Democratic Majority Whip, was forced to resign from Congress after having been caught with his hand in a couple of S&L cookie jars. In recounting Coelho’s two-timing romance with Democrats and corporate contributors, Shalit provides some fascinating glimpses into Coelho’s character.

In 1985, Coelho, in response to an effort by Sen. David Boren (D-OK) to limit PAC contributions, told the *Los Angeles Times*, “I’m not going to let reformers scare me into thinking that I can’t ask people for money.”

White House officials say Coelho will continue in his advisory capacity through the ’96 election—even though he reportedly masterminded the Democrats’ 1994 campaign strategy. As Ickes told Shalit: “I relied on him heavily. He was the first person to urge strongly that we take a hard look at the Republican contract and use it to frame the elections as a collision between Reaganomics and Clintonomics. ... He was key to our focusing on it.”

Maybe Coelho did help the party focus on some differ-

ences between Clintonomics and Reaganomics, such as the deficit. But did he help the Democratic Party focus on the Republican proposal for a capital gains tax—a virtual giveaway to the rich? Did he help the Democrats focus on proposed Republican tort reforms that would protect polluting industries from citizen attack in the courts? Or, focus on Republican promises to roll back government regulations, in effect gutting the enforcement of current public safety measures? No, he did not.

Vic Fingerhut, president of Fingerhut, Powers, Smith and Associates, a Democratic consulting firm, believes that the only way the party can ever win is to run campaigns based on a message of economic populism. (See *In These Times*, May 24, 1989 and Nov. 28, 1994.) Consequently, Fingerhut is sorry to see Wilhelm “take the fall” and leave the chairmanship of the DNC. “He was the only one with a real populist bone in his body,” says Fingerhut. “The initial signs coming from the White House are that it has bought into the Republican agenda and is trying to out-Republican the Republicans. That will be a disaster,” says Fingerhut. “The Republicans are framing everything very cleverly. They are stirring working and middle-income people against minorities, immigrants and welfare mothers. American politics comes down to this: if working and middle-income people can be conned by the Republicans in to thinking that this is a fight against the undeserving poor, then the Republicans win. But the Democrats can win if they focus attention on those elements that favor the rich and the irresponsible corporations and do not favor working and middle-income people.”

Fingerhut has not totally written off the White House as a positive political force. “If Clinton ever got back to his populist roots he would be very good,” says Fingerhut. Yet he has more hope that congressional Democrats will provide needed leadership.

In the first few days of the new congress, Minority Whip Rep. David Bonior (D-MI), one of the House’s more liberal members, took to the floor to rail against the Republicans as the party of “millionaires.” And Bonior has asked Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA), who has one of the quickest tongues in Congress, to come to the fore of congressional debates. “You told us you would be family friendly,” Frank told the Republicans on the opening day of Congress. “You forgot to tell us it would be the Addams family.”

Likewise, in the Senate, Wellstone has vowed to make sure the Democrats will not repeat the mistake they made

in 1981, when they capitulated to the Republican agenda.

On the second day of the new Congress, Wellstone sought to expose the hypocrisy inherent in the Republican legislative reform agenda. He proposed an amendment to a Senate reform bill that would have banned members of Congress from receiving gifts from lobbyists. The Republicans promptly defeated the measure.

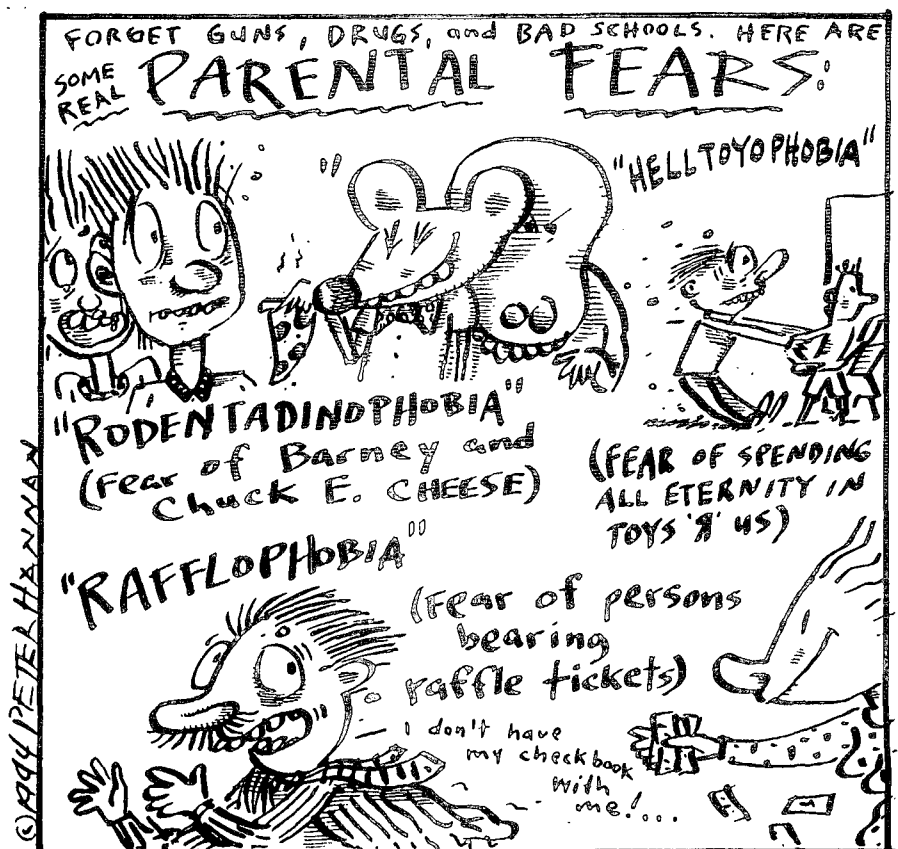
“This is the time for very strong opposition politics,” says Wellstone. “When you really look at the Republican agenda, it represents the biggest change in American politics in my adult life. It isn’t an attempt to overthrow the ’60s, it is an attempt to undo the 1930s.”

Which brings up the problem of the White House. If President Clinton is unable to lead, he could at least get out of the way. Though Clinton is not likely to forgo running for a second term, there is no reason that a progressive populist—and let’s hope it’s someone other than perennial lime-lighter Jesse Jackson—couldn’t challenge Clinton for the nomination.

Imagine the possibility: a nationwide campaign by a populist Democrat critiquing both Clintonomics and Reaganomics. Such a candidate may not win, but his or her efforts could, with savvy organizing, leave behind a national grass-roots infrastructure that would thrive both during and between elections.

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan





CLINTON
at MIDTERM

Wake-up call

B

*Clinton hasn't
"sold out," he's
delivered the
business-
friendly
policies he
promised.
Can he be
pushed to
do more?*

**By Rep. Bernie
Sanders**

efore we can analyze Bill Clinton's presidency and its prospects, we must discuss the social context in which the Clinton administration is currently functioning.

For the vast majority of its people, the United States is becoming a poorer country. The standard of living of the average American worker continues to decline, people are working longer hours, and new jobs are often low-wage, part-time and without benefits. The average American is nervous and angry—and has every reason to be.

The rich are growing richer—and the power they hold over the economic and political life of the nation makes them ever more arrogant as well. No apologies are needed when millionaires and billionaires spend vast sums of money to buy elective office. No apologies are made when striking workers are permanently

replaced. No apologies are even expected when profitable corporations "downsize" their workforces and replace full-time employees with "temps." The wealthy have the power, and are fully prepared to use it for their own selfish ends.

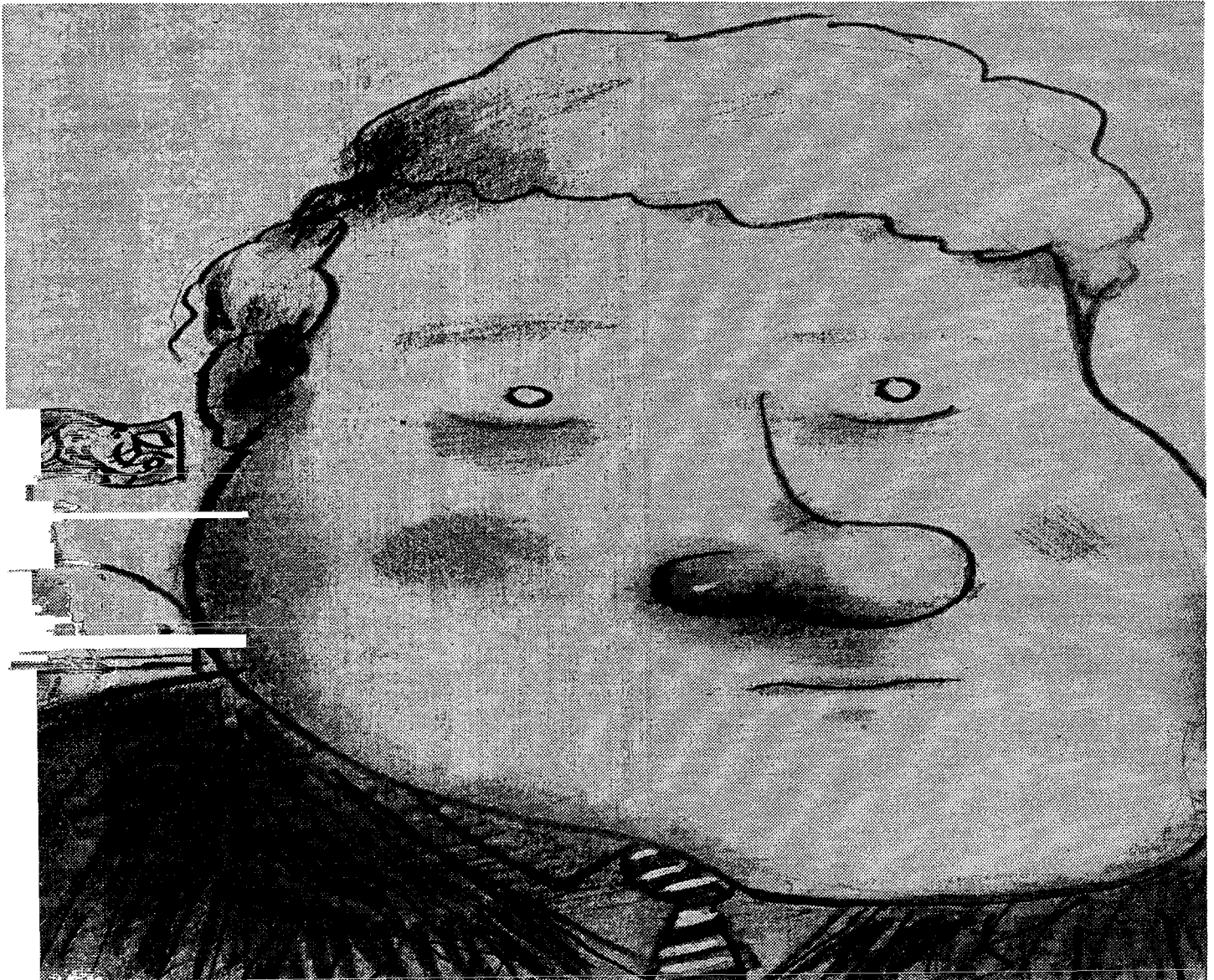
Never before in American history has the mass media's construction of reality been so divorced from the experience of the average American. Workers see with their own eyes the jobs in their communities being exported to Mexico and China, while television gives them endless hours of the O.J. Simpson trial. Working people see with their own eyes the corporate CEO earning 150 times as much as the line worker, while television gives them rapt descriptions of the Dallas Cowboys' offensive strategy.

On those occasions when political ideas manage to fight their way into the mass media, they are almost always taken straight out of a right-wing catechism. Nowadays, the media and the political right are fronted by an interlocking directorate of conservative ideologues. Just a few years ago radio talk shows were supposed to at least make a pretense of non-partisanship. Now nobody is even surprised when Rush Limbaugh is made an honorary member of the Republican freshman class in the House. Nobody is shocked that political commentator Pat Buchanan was a Republican candidate for president (as was Pat Robertson). Nobody thinks twice about the fact that convicted felon and Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy is a major talk-show host.

For these and other reasons, there is virtually no organized and effective opposition to the American ruling class. Tens of millions of Americans, including almost all of the poor, no longer believe that government or politics is relevant to their lives. In the recent election that gave the Republicans their "mandate," 62 percent of the American electorate did not vote. In another country, this turnout might be interpreted as a successful boycott against an illegitimate and unresponsive government. Within this context, let us take a brief look at Bill Clinton's record over the last two years, and discuss some ideas concerning the remainder of his term.

First, serious progressives have no reason to be "disillusioned" with Bill Clinton, or to accuse him of "selling out." Bill Clinton is a moderate Democrat, a founder of the con-

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servative force within the Democratic Party known as the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC). As governor of Arkansas, and during his campaign for president, he made no secret of the fact that “welfare reform,” “crime” and “free trade” were major tenets of his program.

If anything, progressives should be astonished that a moderate Democrat like Clinton could bring himself to raise taxes on the rich, and lower taxes—through an expansion of the earned income tax credit—on the working poor. It was certainly a pleasant surprise when Clinton took military action in support of a popularly elected government in Latin America—as he did to restore Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power in Haiti—instead of bolstering right-wing elites. And after 12 years of Reagan and Bush, it has also been a welcome change to see a president who is pro-choice and who, however ineptly, has tried to remove some of the restrictions on gay men and women in the military.

Has Clinton been a better president than Reagan or Bush? Yes. Have his policies begun to seriously address the

enormous problems facing our nation? No. Has he tried to build a political movement that would empower working people so they could make real improvements in their lives? Absolutely not.

Clinton and his party depend on corporate money and the support of wealthy donors, so it shouldn't surprise us that he would want to placate corporate America with NAFTA, GATT and special trade status for China. We should not be surprised that the president has refused to lead the effort for real campaign finance reform. And we should not be surprised that his health care initiative, which finally placed the American health care crisis at the top of the national agenda, was in fact developed and supported by the largest health insurance companies in the country.

I expect that the Progressive Caucus of the House, which I chair, will soon be meeting with the president once again. Let me briefly touch upon some of the proposals that a number of us will be asking the president to support. Many of them are ideas that we have discussed with him and his

administration before.

•We need to raise the minimum wage. Currently at \$4.25 an hour, the minimum wage must be raised to a level sufficient to keep a full-time wage-earner and his or her family out of poverty. The minimum wage must be raised to \$5.50 an hour immediately. That would not be enough, but it would be a good step forward.

•The president should push for a serious economic stimulus/jobs program, progressively funded, to put Americans back to work rebuilding the physical and human infrastructure of our country. It is absurd that millions of workers are unemployed or underemployed when there is enormous work to be done rebuilding our bridges, railroads, sewer

systems, affordable housing, libraries, schools and roads. We must also put Americans to work providing the child care, preventive health care and education that is so desperately needed.

•The administration must engage in a total rethinking of our disastrous trade policy, which has cost us millions of decent-paying manufacturing jobs, and which is currently running up a \$150 billion trade deficit. NAFTA, GATT and liberalized trade rules with China are a mistake, and must be renegotiated. Corporations must no longer be allowed to throw American workers out on the street so they can wring higher profits out of desperate Third World laborers.

•It's well past time to press Congress for significant decreases in military spending. With the end of the Cold War, it is insane to increase the defense budget, when, in fact, we can make major cuts.

•Sweeping changes in labor law are desperately needed. Workers who wish to join unions must be allowed to do so. We must stop businesses from terrorizing workers and preventing them from forming unions.

•Progressive tax reform is also urgently required. At a time when the richest 1 percent of the population owns more wealth than the bottom 90 percent, when corporate America and the wealthy have enjoyed huge tax breaks for the last 20 years, and when the federal, state and local tax burden has increasingly fallen on the middle class, we must adopt a progressive tax system that is based on one's ability to pay.

We will urge President Clinton to take the lead in explaining to the American people why the "Contract with America" will be a disaster for the elderly, workers, veterans, women, minorities, students, the poor and our environment. And we will ask him to take out his veto pen and to fight alongside us to protect the most fragile and vulnerable people in our society.

Will the president heed our advice? Probably not. He seems not to understand that no matter what he does to please corporate America and the *Wall Street Journal*, they will still hate him. He seems not to understand that the big-money interests who control our economy will not look fondly upon a president who gives them only 75 percent of what they want, when they can have a Republican who will give them 100 percent.

The president needs to understand that his only hope for political survival, and the only strategy for defeating the Republicans, is to rally ordinary Americans under the banner of social justice. Yes, the wealthy control the media and exert a dominant influence over the political and economic life of the nation. But 95 percent of the American people are not wealthy. Clinton's political future, and the defeat of right-wing Republicanism, rests on his ability to understand this simple point—and to make it clear to the ordinary people of this country, that he is on their side. ◀

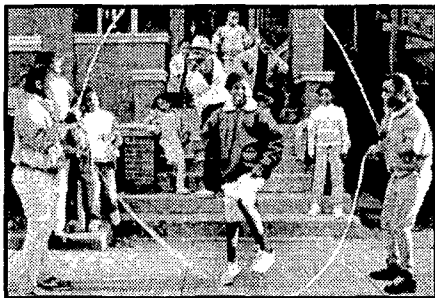
Bernie Sanders, an Independent member of the House of Representatives from the state of Vermont, is chair of Congress' Progressive Caucus.

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There is no mandate for greedlock. You won't find the term in Webster's yet. It was invented in 1992 by my wife, Anne Brower, to describe what the Earth was suffering from before the World Summit in Rio was held to try to ameliorate the problem.

It's time to give American politics an ecospin.

By David R. Brower

The senior Republicans elevated to leadership last November promise to make greedlock far worse—yet they have absolutely no mandate to wreak such havoc.

Did anyone mandate that Congress stop protecting public lands, and instead put them up for a liquidation sale? Or vote for a budget-cutting race with hardly a thought about how much the cuts might cost if we keep postpon-

ing overdue maintenance of our planet? Or insist that these cuts ignore the cost to those who have not yet reached voting age?

And if anyone did vote that way, was it because the media, especially the talk shows, didn't get around to discussing what was at stake? Ugly campaigning prevailed in the 1994 elections. The environment turned up missing in the debates, and we need to find out why. Although few voters realized that the American lands were put up for liquidation, that is undeniably what happened.

And so the current Democratic minority is not a real minority. It simply represents present-day apathy. The Clinton administration should not try to outdo the Republicans by moving to the right. Rather, the president should learn from his failures over the last two years that he needs to take a firmer stand. Clinton's attempts at consensus building have proved to lead to compromised solutions.

To ensure the future of the Earth we need to move beyond a politics dominated by narrow pragmatism. Vice President Al Gore's

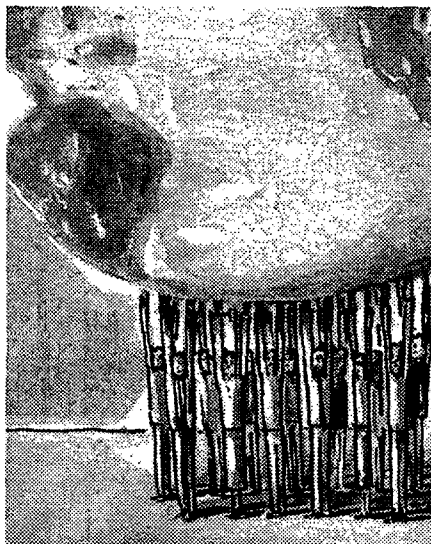
Earth in the Balance was a brilliant book, filled with bold proposals and compassionate thinking. But Gore fails to understand or embrace the ethic of deep ecology, to see that man is only part of nature, not the most important of many endangered species.

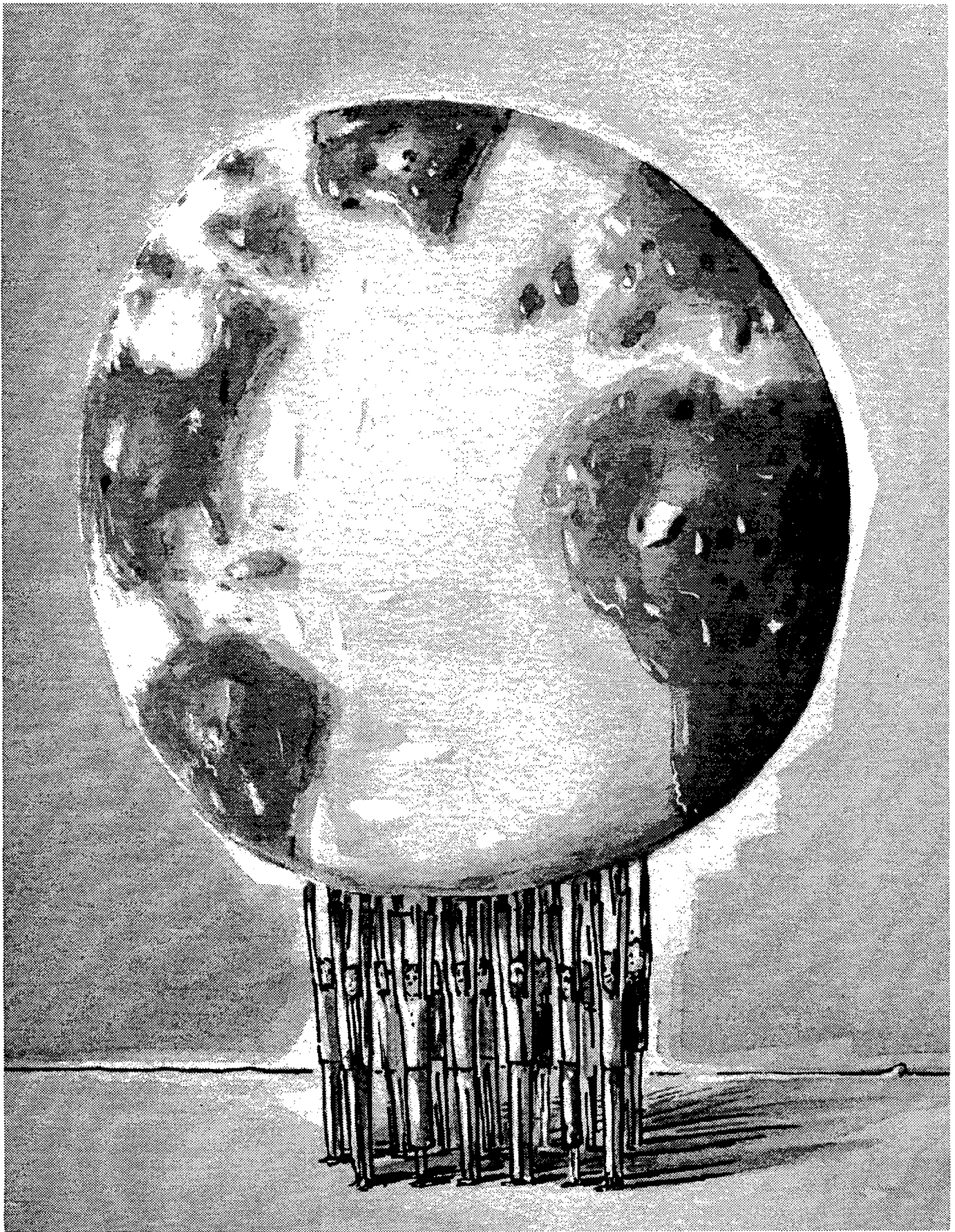
This is a failure shared by all conventional politicians. What, after all, did the campaigns talk about? There was much talk about crime, trade, taxes, spending, deficits, entitlements, illegal aliens, welfare, more about entitlements, the size of government and its nasty regulations. But too little about choice, life, love, freedom and happiness.

And hardly a whisper about the Earth—or the overexpenditure of the Earth's natural capital. Without that ecological wealth there will be no one left alive to be concerned about anything.

There will be no corporate contributors, no Democrats, Republicans, socialists, communists, customers or any other endangered species.

Too many of the new leaders in Congress, including Newt Gingrich, Bob Dole and Jesse Helms, have won grades of naught, zero and zip from the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) in its rating of the House and Senate on 25 impor-





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tant environmental questions. The new Republicans don't really need to be demonized. But they do need to be persuaded that about 85 percent of present U.S. voters have confessed to pollsters that they like the Earth.

Clinton might want to remember this fact as well. If the LCV had rated him, he wouldn't have done much better than many of the new Republicans, nor would departed Speaker of the House Tom Foley. Nor did Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt live up to his environmental billing.

All this happened because the environmental movement has come unglued. What should have been there to lean on wasn't.

I often advise audiences to watch the Russians very closely, and if they can make democracy work, we should try it. The audiences are very kind and never fail to laugh. But there is sadness in the laughter—sadness that after all these years we don't quite have a democracy ourselves, or have lost it.

For how can you call it a democracy when so few people vote or when, as former Colorado Gov. Dick Lamm says, "Politicians are weather vanes in a world that needs compasses." Or when former California governor Jerry Brown, commenting on the corporate financing of political campaigns, points out, "that [when] you have to dance with the one who brung you, how can there be any real change?" Doonesbury observes metaphorically that we are moving from a waffle as president to a Speaker of the House who is a time bomb.

It's time to give all human activity an ecospin, a realization that the Earth is one vast, interrelated ecosystem, the natural processes of which have been tested for uncounted millennia—but it now faces the most severe test of all, to see if it can survive human hubris.

We have taken too much from the Earth and restored too little. We have spent too much of our children's hope on our own instant gratification. We have unwittingly substituted the poverty of materialism for prosperity.

The news isn't all bad. Polio is gone. Life expectancy is up in the North if not the South. There is instant replay on TV. We have Rush Limbaugh to assure us that everything that enviros fret about isn't really a problem and we have the Far Righteous to see that we pray enough as long as we pray right.

But, as Thoreau asked so long ago, "What's the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"

We need a renewed stirring of love for the Earth, a realization that what we can do to it is not always what we ought to do, and a determination to protect and celebrate its wildness and beauty as proof that this generation, our own, has love for the next.

Deferring maintenance and replacement in the operation of this society is the falsest of economies—and too many leaders, whatever their party, are pledging allegiance to that sad error.

The Earth is in desperate need of CPR: Conservation, Preservation and Restoration.

Conservation requires a far more intelligent use of natural capital than most corporations have in mind—that is, making us pay for their use of our land, and their pollution of it as well.

Preservation calls for the maximum protection of what we cannot replace, to wit, the biodiversity of the Earth—and that includes the endangered species we haven't discovered yet, which are here on their own errands while we go about killing them willy-nilly.

Restoration, of natural and human systems, is what the new age is all about. We can stop trying to undo the Earth's immune systems.

Helping nature heal and the bettering of human systems are certainly essential elements on the road to a sustainable society. Whatever these elements cost is much less than it will cost us if we fail to recognize their indispensability. In fact, respect for the Earth can be almost as profitable in the short run as it will be in the long run. If you don't think restoration can be a money maker, take your car or your body to a repair shop and look at the bill.

Here are a few things the Clinton administration can do to help speed the process:

- We should change the name and mission of the Bureau of Land Management to the National Land Service, and give it a mandate to protect all land in the United States, not just public land.

- We should establish a National Biosphere Reserve system to include present Biosphere Reserves together with unprotected lands under all jurisdictions, including private lands, and set up minimum performance standards.

- We should set up a World Ecological Bank to protect natural and cultural sites of outstanding importance.

- We should try to persuade all foundations on Earth to invest a minimum of a tenth of their equity in a World Ecological Fund, a revolving fund for acquiring habitat for endangered species and cultures as well as for buying out threats to other natural resources.

The bridge to a green century has to be designed by this administration and this Congress and built by the next one. We need to figure out where we'll be when they take the bold leap we're urging them to take.

I suspect that Bill Clinton has not yet learned to believe in himself. He is having a great deal of trouble in deciding whether to be himself or the Great Capitulator. We hope his current predicament will help to change his evaluation of himself. He can still be a brilliant president; that's up to him. But we need to help him make it possible.

We are just brief tenants on this planet, and there are uncounted billions of tenants to come, probably for periods briefer than our own. But we are the only people who can vote on their behalf.

Government is not evil. It can be improved. We need it. It needs us. And all living things need a preserved, restored Earth.

David R. Brower is the president of the Earth Island Action Group.



Overkill

Candidate Clinton's promises to substantially downsize the military have been betrayed by President Clinton's policies.

By Ira Shorr

I was sequestered in a hotel room at the end of a recent vacation when I channel-surfed into an Arsenio Hall rerun. Arsenio was asking presidential candidate Bill Clinton how he would tackle the tough problems facing America. A wave of nostalgia hit me as I listened to Clinton pledge to rebuild the country by securing federal investments in education, job training and infrastructure repair. The audience broke into applause as he declared that our nation would reap the rewards of winning the Cold War and pay for domestic programs with reductions from the military budget.

But while candidate Clinton wooed voters with promises of a peace dividend, President Clinton has led Congress in playing taps over its grave. Unwilling to significantly cut defense spending, Clinton proved

unable to bankroll any productive domestic initiatives, and so helped till the ground for his party's midterm election massacre. What little hope there was for a midterm shift in direction was buried when the president gave in to congressional hawks and announced his attention to seek a \$25 billion increase in military spending over the next six years to fill a so-called readiness gap. That move highlights the administration's continuing inability to reinvent the Pentagon bureaucracy.

Granted, Bill Clinton entered the White House suffering from a military-inferiority complex and in a poor position to challenge the Pentagon. His immediate defeat on ending discrimination against gays in the military probably convinced Clinton that the most he could do was give the armed services a big enough bone so they'd sit in a corner while he went after health care reform.

In March 1993, the Clinton administration put forth a plan calling for spending \$1.3 trillion on the military over five years. Although Clinton's first two military budgets reflected a modest 5 percent reduction in the

spending projections of the Bush administration, virtually all of the savings generated by those cuts wound up going to deficit reduction. Indeed, the Clinton administration's budgets for fiscal years 1994 and 1995 showed no net gain in public spending on education, job training and other human-resource investments. The Clinton presidency found itself long on domestic investment strategies and short on cash. Although the Pentagon pot was filled with riches, it was virtually placed out of bounds.

For over 40 years the Soviet threat had provided the definitive rationale for U.S. military budget proposals. But the end of the Cold War brought with it uncertainty, and defense bureaucrats at first reacted with unusual candor. Former Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney told the Armed Services Committee in 1992, "The threats have become remote, so remote they are difficult to discern." Several months later, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell noted that "I'm running out of demons, I'm running out of villains."

But by September 1993, when the Pentagon released its "bottom-up review"—the long-awaited assessment of the forces and weapons needed to meet the threats of a post-Cold War world—the military had found its "villains." Mostly, they were found in the Third World terrain around North Korea, Iraq, Iran and Syria—with our allies Russia and China presented as potential future enemies. To meet these newly expanded threats the president's five-year military plan called for spending \$1.3 trillion between 1995 and 1999, an average of \$260 billion a year.

These budget figures were driven by the assumption, con-

tained in the bottom-up review, that the United States must be able to simultaneously wage two Desert Storm-size wars anywhere in the world—and without the help of allies. Ironically, the U.S. commitment to fight two wars without assistance may very well convince our allies to reduce their own defense spending. When the bottom-up review was released in 1993, Brian McDonald, a Canadian military analyst, was

insufficient to fund the new weapons and high force levels called for in the bottom-up review. A study by the General Accounting Office estimated that budget shortfalls over the next five years could total as much as \$150 billion. Figures like this will set the stage for the upcoming defense budget debate, with Republicans and conservative Democrats clamoring for military increases.

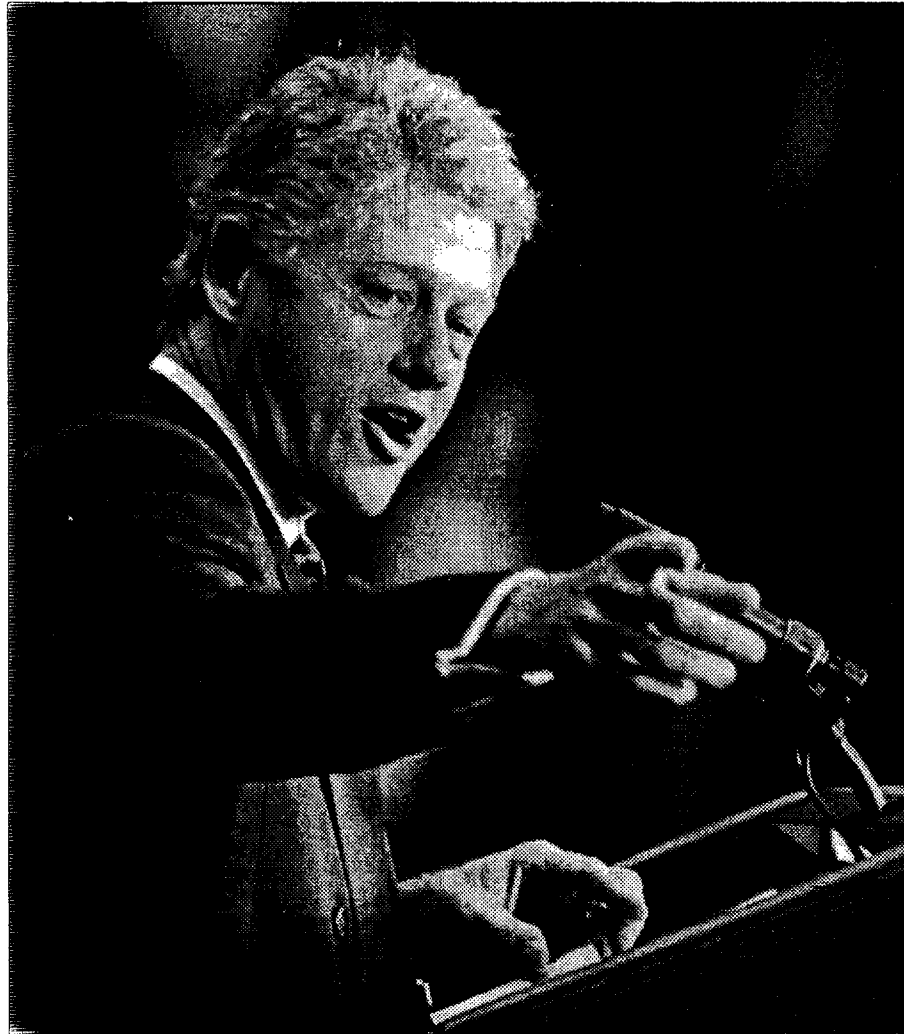
The timid attempts last year in Congress to kill unneeded weapons systems were blocked by politicians from both parties who fought for programs that bring jobs to their constituents. California Democrat Dianne Feinstein, in a Freudian slip on the Senate floor, defended the B-2 bomber because it “could deliver a large payroll”—she meant to tout the bomber’s *payload*. Of course, the B-2 does indeed drop a great many jobs into California.

When the Senate was voting on funding for the MILSTAR satellite, the Department of Defense kindly passed around literature reporting that nearly 8,000 workers in 35 states were dependent on the program. Funding for the MILSTAR program was easily approved in both houses. It’s not surprising that this economic cold war makes it more difficult to find Democrats who will stand up to the Clinton administration and demand deeper military reductions.

President Clinton can be credited with putting defense conversion on the political map. With administration encouragement, Congress has put more resources into conversion programs and created an Office of Economic Conversion to better assist defense-dependent workers, communities and businesses.

But the president’s platform pledge that “every dollar we save by downsizing our armed forces and defense industries will be reinvested during our transition to a post-Cold War economy” was lost to deficit reduction. The \$2.5 billion spent on conversion programs in 1994 is less than four days of military spending.

Ironically, while the bottom-up review noted the danger of weapons proliferation, it conveniently ignored America’s leadership role in supplying arms. Picking up where the Bush administration left off, Bill Clinton has presided over an arms-sale boom. Under the leadership of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, the Clinton administration has aggressively pursued foreign markets as a way to help U.S. weapons-makers adjust to the loss of domestic markets. The United States now leads the world in weapons exports and



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quoted in *Defense News* as saying, “I think as a result of the [Clinton plan] we will see increased moves inside the Canadian government to cut the defense budget.” Why should our allies pump up their own armies when the United States is already spending almost as much on its military as the rest of the world combined?

Although military budgets—when considered in inflation-adjusted dollars—dropped by a third between 1985 and 1994, the fact is that the 1994 defense budget remained 10 percent higher than what the United States spent on the military in 1975. The Pentagon plans to spend virtually the same amount of money in 1999 as it did in 1975. The much-touted reduction in military spending is really a return to mid-’70s Cold War levels.

But even that high level of spending will probably be

sells more arms to developing nations than the rest of the world combined. If potential buyers can't afford to buy our weapons, we sell them on credit, loan them out, or even give away older models. Bill Hartung of the World Policy Institute has estimated that the federal government spends more than \$7 billion a year promoting arms exports. That includes the cost of loans to buyer nations as well as the salaries of thousands of government workers who promote the sales.

Clinton's leadership on nuclear weapons reduction has also been suspect. In last year's Nuclear Policy Review, Clinton accepted the Pentagon's recommendation to continue the Bush administration's nuclear policies, signalling to the world that the United States intends to maintain the capability to fight a nuclear war into the 21st century. The review discourages new negotiations with Russia on deeper cuts in nuclear arsenals, leaving the Russians with 3,000 strategic nuclear weapons and the United States with 3,500 through the year 2003. Although these totals are well below Cold War peaks, the numbers are far in excess of what's needed to deter any potential nuclear transgressor.

With the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty up for renewal in 1995, there is concern that non-nuclear states like Mexico will balk at renewing the treaty because they believe the nuclear superpowers are reneging on their commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons. As with other issues, President Clinton's stated goal of nuclear non-proliferation is compromised by the reality of his own policies.

For peace activists, one of the greatest disappointments of the Clinton presidency has been the administration's failure to push for the establishment of a permanent U.N. peacekeeping force. When Clinton first took office, he seemed ready to lessen the global burden on the U.S. military by turning to the United Nations. In April 1992, candidate Clinton called for the establishment of a multilateral "rapid deployment force" to "stand guard at the borders of countries threatened by aggression, preventing mass violence against civilian populations, providing humanitarian relief and combatting terrorism."

But the United States' chaotic experience in Somalia provided ammunition to opponents of U.S. participation in U.N. missions. Conservatives in Congress led a charge against the U.N. that poisoned the political atmosphere for multilateral peacekeeping. (Newt Gingrich referred to joint peacekeeping as a "multinational fantasy.") In early May President Clinton issued a presidential directive on U.S.

participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations. While offering some practical ways to strengthen the management of U.N. peacekeeping funding, the document represented a major retreat from candidate Clinton's multilateral vision. The United States is now firmly on record opposing any "standing U.N. army." American participation in U.N. peacekeeping efforts now has to "advance U.S. interests"—never mind the larger human interest—and the command of U.S. forces will not be transferred to U.N. control. In addition, the U.S. share of the U.N.'s peacekeeping expenses will be reduced from its current level of 31.7 percent to 25 percent. While the United States does fund a significant proportion of the U.N.'s peacekeeping budget, our yearly assessment amounts to only one-tenth of 1 percent of our annual defense budget. The Clinton administration's peacekeeping policy is likely to weaken the international community's ability to resolve conflicts cooperatively. And a weakened U.N. makes the effort to reduce U.S. military forces even more difficult.

Despite its failure to support multilateral peacekeeping, the Clinton administration can be commended for placing a greater emphasis on negotiation as a means of resolving international conflict. In Haiti, Clinton reversed the U.S. tradition of supporting repression in the Western Hemisphere. Through dialogue backed up with a show of force, he restored a popularly elected politician to office.

Whether this upholding of democracy is the basis for a "Clinton Doctrine"—as Amy Wilentz has written in the *Washington Post* and elsewhere—or a lucky break in the intervention game, is still unclear.

The U.S.-North Korean nuclear agreement has the potential to be an even more significant achievement. By defusing the crisis through a negotiated settlement, the Clinton administration has forged an agreement that could prevent a new nuclear power from emerging and has removed the spark that could have ignited a nuclear arms race in Asia. At the same time, if the negotiated settlement holds, the Pentagon would lose one of its most threatening hot spots—leaving poorly equipped militaries like Iran and the beleaguered Iraq to uphold the rationale for the two-war strategy.

Still, five years after the end of the Cold War, the question remains: who will stand up to the Pentagon, the world's largest and most costly bureaucracy? It's clear that without pressure from the public or progressive forces in Congress, this commander in chief won't take on the military. With the lurch to the right in the November elections, it's also clear that this year's defense budget debate is likely to be dominated by conservative voices calling once again for "rebuilding"

***The much-touted
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the military.

A coalition of Washington peace and disarmament organizations is attempting to draw together policy analysts, politicians and grass-roots activists who are committed to rethinking America's national security interests. With mainstream figures like Lawrence Korb, an assistant secretary of defense under Ronald Reagan, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and former CIA Director William Colby on record supporting significant military reductions, the call for the U.S. military to adapt to post-Cold War realities can be greatly amplified. And Senate Democrats recently showed signs of life by proposing \$33 billion in cuts in weapons and space programs over the next five years.

The irony, of course, is that while the United States faces no significant military threat, Americans feel at their most vulnerable because of the economic and social decline they see all around them, a decline candidate Bill Clinton promised to reverse. But by

using tax dollars to sustain military force levels designed to fight yesterday's wars, the Clinton administration will ensure its inability to confront the issues that most concern the public.

As long as the president's military policy is grounded in the defense of the status quo, there will be few resources available for him to deal with the nation's core problems. Bill Clinton could draw inspiration from Dwight D. Eisenhower's warning about the

unwarranted power of the military-industrial complex and take the case for the peace dividend to the nation. Eisenhower waited until he was leaving office; but Clinton had better do it now or, like Arsenio Hall, his program will be headed for cancellation. ◀

Ira Shorr is senior producer of *America's Defense Monitor*, a weekly television program produced by the Center for Defense Information.

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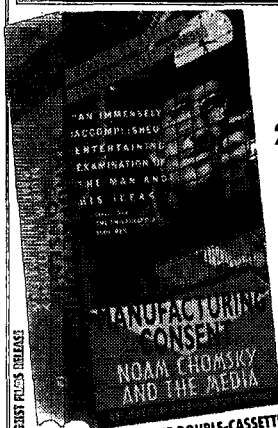
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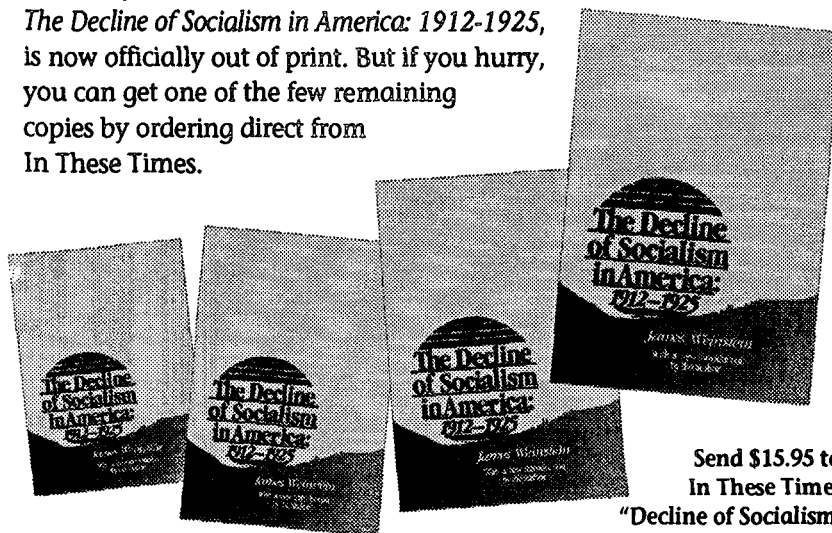
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D E F E N S E C O N V E R S I O N

Base jumping

*Can American
communities
learn to
live without
military
bases?*

By David Moberg
ALAMEDA, CALIF.

This island community on the east shore of the San Francisco Bay, linked by an old bridge and a tunnel to Oakland, knows quite intimately how the military giveth and how the military taketh away. For the past 55 years, Alameda has been the site of a 3,000-acre Naval Air Station and Depot. As recently as 1992 the base employed about 12,200 military personnel and 4,800 civilian workers, many of whom refurbished old airplanes in its giant hangars and machine shops. Yet by 1997, as a result of a long needed but long deferred trimming of the military's bloated infrastructure, the base will close.

Goaded into action, local leaders are trying to shape a new future not only for the base but for the broader community. A local business consultant and the

Machinists union are planning a network of worker-owned cooperatives that would take control of many base facilities. And the Arms Control Research Center, a local disarmament and conversion advocacy group, proposes breaking up and recycling old ships at Alameda and two other closed Navy bases. Other projects may take longer to develop. The Alameda County Economic Development Advisory Board took the lead in proposing a Center for Environmental Technologies that would tap the expertise of local universities and national laboratories to develop new technologies, some of which might be tested in cleaning up the polluted base site itself. Scientists from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (itself facing cutbacks) and the University of California at Berkeley are pushing for the creation of Science City, a proposed research center and industrial park.

Despite this outpouring of ingenuity, it is unclear how soon—if ever—these proposed projects could provide employment for the

44,000 workers who will directly or indirectly lose their jobs as a result of base closings in the East Bay area.

The Alameda Naval Air Station was on the 1993 hit list prepared by the Base Realignment and Closures Commission (BRAC), the agency established in 1988 to minimize the political obstacles to reducing the profusion of bases. The Pentagon recognized that its overblown system of bases was "irrational" even before the fall of the Berlin Wall. In its first three lists, BRAC recommended (among other cuts) the closing of 70 major bases, which would result in a loss of about 132,000 civilian defense jobs. This year it is scheduled to produce another list that many observers expect to equal or surpass the previous three combined.

In a few instances, such as the closing of the Presidio in San Francisco or Fort Sheridan along suburban Chicago's affluent lakefront, base closings have proven to be opportunities for local communities to take over valuable land. Yet even there defenders of public interests, from proponents of open space to those seeking shelter for the homeless, have had to fight prolonged battles against exploitation of the bases by narrow private interests. Though by law the Presidio will fall under the control of the National Park Service, groups have fought against maneuvers by real estate developers as well as an attempted takeover of the base's independent electric power grid by PG&E, the big private utility.

In many cases, local base commanders and politicians have subverted the intentions of BRAC and Congress. According to a study by Business Executives for National Security, a group critical of excessive military spending, 26

This is the final installment of a three-part series on defense conversion. The series was made possible in part by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

of the first 67 bases scheduled to be closed were in fact not closed, or were reopened under a new name or are serving a different defense function. The 1949 law that still governs transfer of federal property gives other defense or federal agencies first claim to vacated property. Yet when defense units assert their claims on the vacant facilities, the military base structure remains inefficiently swollen. That reduces savings and postpones an inevitable readjustment.

Nevertheless, it is easy to understand local resistance to base closings. For communities like Alameda and Oakland, closings are at first an economic catastrophe—the East Bay region stands to lose as much as \$2 billion a year in economic activity after all the currently scheduled base closures are completed.

But there is also evidence from past closings that suggests turning the bases over to other public and private uses can in the long run be a social and economic boon. The Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA), the Defense Department agency responsible for aiding conversion, claims that from 1961 to 1993 171,177 new jobs replaced the 87,557 civilian jobs lost at 97 closed bases.

Researchers Catherine Hill and James Raffel, however, suggest that the OEA report is overly optimistic. In a 1993 study for the National Commission for Economic Conversion and Disarmament, they argued that the OEA report was misleading, because it counted jobs moved from nearby towns to the base as “new” jobs rather than simply relocated ones.

Nevertheless, military bases can be converted to civilian uses that yield jobs and other social benefits. Conversion advocates maintain that the process works best if there is early planning, broad public involvement and strong government support for conversion, usually from agencies outside the Defense Department.

Far more than conversion of private defense industries, conversion of military bases should attract special attention “because it’s an issue more in the public domain,” argues Michael Closson, executive director of the Center for Eco-

nomics Conversion, a think tank in Mountain View, Calif. Yet too often, he notes, local business and political elites have dominated the conversion process, often with an eye for real estate deals and quick tax revenue rather than the lasting economic health of the community. Even at Alameda, where there is strong and varied public involvement, real estate developers hungrily eye parts of the base for upscale housing with a view across the bay, even though that kind of conversion is not likely to yield much in the way of jobs.

Whatever the past record, conversion of bases in the '90s will in most cases be more difficult than it was over the past three decades, Hill and Raffel argue. More bases are closing in a shorter period. The economy is less robust, particularly in the manufacturing sector, making it harder to simply create industrial parks and lure factories. There is less federal aid available for economic development, and more stringent environmental regulation.

The Clinton administration, though, has taken some



steps to ease and speed base conversion. Speaking at the Alameda base, Clinton promised faster environmental cleanup and less red tape. Last year the president mandated community advisory boards on cleanup at each base, and made it possible for communities to receive base property free or at low cost. (The Pentagon had often sold the best land at auction, then turned over the least desirable property

to local communities.)

But Republican control of Congress now threatens to make the process far more difficult and painful. Base closings are likely to be slowed somewhat by Republican efforts to reverse military cuts and increase spending. More significantly, though, the GOP plans to eliminate federal initiatives such as the Economic Development Administration, which has been one of the main sources of base conversion aid. In December, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), a leading member of the Armed Services Committee, complicated matters further, circulating a letter attacking the use of defense funds for non-defense purposes, including both conversion and environmental cleanup.

Even without such challenges, conversion would likely have proceeded haltingly. The U.S. General Accounting Office reported in April of last year that cleanup efforts were already going slowly on the 2,521 polluted sites located on 149 different military installations slated for closing. It also concluded that cleanup costs were likely to increase. Simply cleaning up the Bay Area bases could cost \$1 billion. And while the environmental restoration of bases at first seemed to be accelerating under Clinton, Congress last year cut appropriations for cleaning both active and closing bases for fiscal year 1995 to \$2.4 billion from \$2.5 billion in fiscal year 1994.

With economic development funds tight for many conversion projects, new strains on cleanup funds, and the number of closed bases potentially doubling this year, conversion prospects looked a tad anemic before the Republicans took power. Now they look nearly cadaverous.

That will be especially bad news for California, whose economy remained rosy as long as it did in large part because of defense-related employment. The state's many bases provide numerous potential targets for cuts. California accounted for nearly 70 percent of Defense Department personnel reductions or transfers from the first three BRAC rounds and can be expected to endure further sharp cuts in the future.

Local cynics suspect that the East Bay was targeted in part because it is represented in Congress by Democratic Rep. Ron Dellums, a longtime military critic and now ranking minority member of the House Armed Services Committee. Rather than fight the closing, Dellums worked diligently during his two years as committee chairman to develop conversion alternatives.

Dellums arranged financing that enabled an East Bay Conversion and Reinvestment Commission, reflecting a range of community interests, to investigate innovative conversion opportunities. Some of its suggestions, such as giving fire and security forces from the bases first priority in new hiring by local fire and police departments, have already been adopted. But the ultimate decisions on the base's future will be made by a local Re-use Authority, which is likely to take title to much of the land and lease or sell it.

Nevertheless, the commission will argue in its final report next month that base conversion planning should not focus simply on what to do with the base's land, but more broad-

ly on how the base could become part of an economic development strategy for the region as a whole.

Such a "two channel" strategy could affect many decisions, such as cleanup. "The dominant paradigm is for the military to clean up and get out of the way," said commission chair Carl Anthony, "but the cleanup could be an engine for conversion. Small business could develop new technologies to protect public health or the ecology." The planned Alameda Center for Environmental Technology reflects this strategy. It includes a revolving loan fund to help finance small, innovative environmental businesses in the area, not just on the base.

Further, the base closing could serve to jump-start a number of "green industries." As proposed, Alameda's Science City would focus on electric vehicles, environmental technology, semiconductor manufacturing, health care and other high-tech, often environmentally oriented, technologies. "If we take this as a watershed for the next century to make the economy more sustainable, whole new vistas open up," argues Anthony, who is also president of Earth Island Institute, the innovative environmental group based in San Francisco. "The whole economy has to shift to a more ecological model."

Science City will require federal money to cover part of its estimated \$100 million cost, and it will take at least a decade or more to develop. "It's all up in the air because of changes in Washington," suggested Mark Friedman, who sits on the Re-use Authority as a representative of County Supervisor Wilma Chan. "The space is there but the federal resources aren't there to implement all of these proposals."

In any case, argues economist Eve Bach of the Arms Control Research Center in San Francisco, local planners should devote more attention to short-term transition work, such as the ship-recycling scheme. "Science City is an example of how if we had ham, we could have ham and eggs—if we had eggs," she said. "From beginning to end, what we're talking about is something pretty unrealistic." Despite its long-term possibilities, Science City promises more for engineers and high-tech entrepreneurs than for workers now losing their jobs.

Early last year, concern about those displaced workers prompted Len Bertain, a physicist-turned-business-productivity-consultant, to link up with the Machinists union, which represents many base workers. Bertain, who has successfully promoted worker empowerment as a tool to revitalize business, thought the base offered the possibility to duplicate the Mondragon model, a successful network of worker cooperatives in Spain.

In the model Bertain and the union are promoting, profits from the co-ops would be divided among capital accounts of the worker-owners and the system itself, the Productivity Network. The democratically governed Network would use its profits to invest in and develop new worker cooperatives, thus continually expanding job opportunities. The Machinists union would play an important watchdog role, much like that of Mondragon's social council.

Initially, Bertain thinks that 200 workers could be employed in businesses that take advantage of some of the base facilities, such as the airplane stripping and paint shops, the machine shop and the virtually new (and environmentally sound) plating facility. Bertain has already lined up two semiconductor businesses that would locate at the base to take advantage of the worker co-ops. Although some of the new co-ops could immediately find much commercial work, during the transition ongoing government contracts will be important, both to provide revenue and to serve as collateral for bank loans for operating capital. Worker-owners would be expected to invest \$10,000 each, possibly borrowing through socially conscious loan funds or a new community development bank that is scheduled to open in Oakland later this year.

Bertain and the Machinists worry that the Navy and local authorities will not act fast enough. "In 36 months the base could be converted if there were a concrete plan," Machinist official John Moran said, "but it could all be gone in 24 months. I don't see any money being spent on conversion, any commitment to transition. You need both hard cash and long-term commitment."

But Moran is prayerfully enthusiastic about the cooperative network. "You put an owner-operated company with modern equipment in the market, and it will wipe out the competition," he said. "Worker participation when carried to rational limits is revolutionary. You don't need corporations."

Not everyone is as enthusiastic. "Who will run the company?" asks real estate developer Don Parker, until recently director of the Re-use Authority. "Who will be the CEO? Who will get financing? I'm in the development business. I know how hard it is to get things done. So I'm by nature skeptical."

Parker argues, by contrast, that the best hope for the long term is "a mixed-use environment—condominiums, residences, recreational development, waterfront use, marinas." He sees little to save in the base's buildings and virtually no future for manufacturing jobs.

Though Alameda's new mayor, elected last November, may be slightly more sympathetic to ideas like the worker co-ops and less tied in to real estate developers than his predecessor, the debate on the future of the Alameda Naval Air Station and Depot is still in its early rounds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may claim as much as 60 percent of the land as a refuge for the endangered least tern, which nests there.

Ultimately, if the more ambitious plans to use the base to generate new jobs in both manufacturing and engineering stall for lack of government or private funds, then real estate developers will be hovering above the carcass of the base. Local politicians may be tempted to take the condos and their property taxes rather than to struggle to create a centerpiece for regional job growth.

There are, however slim they may seem, reasons for hope. The process of base conversion at Alameda provides for a continual public role—however feeble—in shaping its

future. Public participation may slow decision-making, but it also provides opportunities to entertain creative conversion ideas far beyond what is possible with the private defense industry. The Clinton administration has "reinvented government" to make that democratic planning process work faster and better, even if it has not been able to provide enough money to make conversion work as well as it could.

Unfortunately, this progress is now threatened by a Republican majority that believes no more in conversion than it does in government itself. And the greater the uncertainty communities feel about the prospects for conversion, the more resistance there will be to cuts in defense spending itself. ▲

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BLACK AMERICA

Circling the wagons

T

he most moving moment in House Speaker Newt Gingrich's (R-GA) first speech to the new Republican Congress concerned the plight of the black poor. Gingrich said he had "seldom been more shaken" than when a member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) told him about visiting a first-grade class and realizing that every fourth or fifth boy would either be dead or in jail within 15 years. Gingrich already had startled the assembled legislators by lauding the Democratic Party for its part in the struggle for racial desegregation.

It may seem incongruous for this conservative firebrand to use his time in the national spotlight to discuss issues of race and opportunity. But Gingrich is an adept political strategist who understands the value of symbolism. He knows that racial antagonisms

helped fuel the growth of the new Republican majority and that there is a widespread fear that ascendant conservatives now will exploit those antagonisms to reverse racial progress.

Such an effort could easily provoke civil unrest. This fear of increased racial tensions is the Republicans' Achilles heel. With his conciliatory opening, Speaker Gingrich sought to lessen the GOP's vulnerability to that fear.

But most African-American leaders and organizers were not mollified. For a vast majority of black leaders, the Republican revolution and the rise of Gingrich are dire developments. "Newt Gingrich frightens many black people," says Wade Henderson, director of the NAACP's Washington, D.C. branch. "Much of what he says on subjects like crime and welfare has an undertone that strikes a racial chord among African-Americans."

Many black leaders cast the looming changes in much more apocalyptic terms. Gingrich is "black folks' worst nightmare," says Les Kimber, publisher of the black-owned *California Advocate*, a Fresno-based weekly. According to Kimber, Gingrich is "a mean-spirited bigot who thinks he's supposed to tear down everything we've built up."

And even sober academics see social trauma in the policies the Republicans promise. "The logic of these new policies leads us in a very dangerous direction," says Ron Walters, chairman of Howard University's political science department. "We are headed in the direction of fascism and civil strife. There are high social costs that come with these policies, and the new congressional leadership seems blithely unaware of those costs."

Some of the old leadership, particularly the black congressional leadership, is acutely aware of the dangers. But the CBC has less clout in the 104th Congress than it has had in any time during its 25-year history. However, outgoing CBC chairman Kweisi Mfume (D-MD) believes Republican control may liberate black lawmakers to more freely speak their minds. "We've become in many respects bigger fish in a smaller pond," he says.

In the 103rd Congress, there were 38 black Democrats in a House of 258 Democrats. In the 104th, there are 38 among 204; from 15 percent of House Democrats to nearly 19 percent. If Oklahoma's newly elected Republican Congressman, J.C. Watts, joins the CBC, there will be 41 caucus members, including the House's only other black Republican, Gary Franks, and Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL).

The CBC's new chairman is Rep. Donald M. Payne (D-NJ). The conciliatory Payne defeated a more combative

*Black leaders
confront a
Republican
future.*

By Salim Muwakkil

Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL) in a 23-15 vote. Observers see Payne's victory as a signal of the CBC's intention to strike a less confrontational pose with the Republican Congress. "We're going to have to work with the Republican leadership to make sure that policies we think are important are included in the agenda," Payne told reporters after his election. "We intend to remain the moral conscience of this Congress."

But there is considerable debate within the CBC about the group's direction in this new political context. One faction argues that the CBC should be more attentive to forging coalitions with like-minded congressional groups. "Never before have conditions been better for making connections with others who see the folly and dangers posed by those right-wing extremists who have taken over the Republican Party," says Rep. Major Owens (D-NY). Owens and his allies feel no need to go easy on Clinton during this period. "We expect him to move to the right and away from our concerns, so we expect to keep his feet to the fire."

The faction that supported Hastings thinks the CBC should aggressively confront the GOP Congress. "Some of the more ideological and, I must add, committed members think this is a good time to make stark demarcations between the policies of the left and those of the right," says one congressional aide who prefers anonymity. "They believe that many Americans, and not just black Americans, would be educated by such an aggressive strategy. They know that some of their colleagues would."

The divisions within the CBC are indicative of similar divisions among black organizers. Since the November elections, organizations representing varied aspects of the black community have convened urgent meetings to discuss issues raised by the GOP landslide. The National African-American Leadership Summit met in early December (see *In These Times*, January 8), the Black Leadership Forum assembled in late December and the National Rainbow Coalition gathered during the first week of the year. Each of these confabs concluded with similar denunciations of the Republicans' "Contract with America."

The Black Leadership Forum, which represents mainstream civil rights leadership, countered the Republican contract with its own "Covenant For America's Future." Co-chaired by the Rev. Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the group's press statement summoned religious metaphors to make the case for increased social investment.

And although the Rev. Jesse Jackson's National Rainbow Coalition issued a much more detailed document following its leadership meeting, the overarching principles were consonant with those emphasized by Lowery's group.

During the Rainbow Coalition's meeting, Jackson urged progressives to remain steadfast. "It wasn't that the Republican tide was so high, it was that the flood walls were so low. Six million fewer people voted in 1994 than in 1992. We simply must revive people's spirit," he said.

Although he made no commitment for or against another presidential campaign, several Jackson supporters think 1996 offers him the best opportunity for a real victory. If Ross Perot stands by his promise to create a third party—thus splintering the presidential vote—Jackson may be perfectly positioned to run a credible independent race.

During the Rainbow confab, Jackson was careful to moderate his criticism of Clinton, but he was scathingly critical of the GOP's Contract with America. During the next two years, Jackson's group clearly intends to remind the Clinton administration of the GOP contract's social costs and to prevent too much accommodation with congressional Republicans.

Unlike the Rainbow Coalition meeting, which featured a multiracial array of progressive leaders, the African-American Leadership Summit was dominated by black nationalists. And its view of the GOP triumph is a bit more ambivalent. On the one hand, the group hopes that the Republican rejection of civil rights remedies will act as a wake-up call that will shock black Americans into becoming more self-reliant. But on the other hand, it fears the real deprivations threatened by the GOP contract. Ironically, the summit's nationalists, who have traditionally shunned civil rights-style demonstrations, have organized the most vigorous schedule of protest activities, culminating in a planned march of 1 million black men on Washington next October.

This profusion of proposed strategies is a symptom of black America's tactical confusion. Black leadership seems rudderless, lost in a post-civil rights world with only civil rights tactics at hand.

The lack of progressive alternatives to the increasingly tribal reactions of so many on both sides of the color line has resulted in a dangerous increase in racial and cultural polarization. Ironically, Clinton's election was seen by many as an important development in bridging those racial and cultural gaps. "Clinton is the first Democrat since Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 to bring the Bubbas, the Brothers and the Bunkers together," wrote *Chicago Tribune* columnist Clarence Page in 1992.

But now the Bubbas (Southern whites) and the Bunkers (Northern, Archie Bunker ethnics) are Clinton's severest critics. And the Brothers (urban blacks) are not far behind. The promise of a bright Democratic light at the end of a dark, 12-year Republican tunnel has been irreparably damaged. Instead, we stand at the threshold of another dark tunnel.

"This Republican takeover may be a boon, in that it may help progressives get off the dime and begin some serious organizing," says Howard's Walters. "But a more dismal result is more likely. I genuinely fear for the future of this country because I see these reactionary Republicans trying to reinstitutionalize a brand of white supremacy that we thought had been vanquished. That's the direction in which they're headed; the stakes are quite high that they be stopped."

NATIONALISM

Russian devolution

As President Boris Yeltsin's war against the breakaway republic of Chechnya comes to a bloody climax, some analysts are warning that whatever the battlefield outcome, the stage has been set for profound political convulsions in Moscow and explosive new challenges to Russia's fragile post-Soviet unity.

Will the struggle in Chechnya destroy Russia?

By Fred Weir
MOSCOW

The most urgent danger, many say, is that the remnants of Russia's democratic experiment are disintegrating under the impact of ethnic war and political crisis. The theoretical authoritarianism enshrined in Yeltsin's 1993 constitution is already a reality, and the longer emergency conditions continue the more likely it becomes that vengeful military-security apparatchiks will move to seize power.

Yeltsin sent troops into

Chechnya on December 11 to crush the tiny republic's three-year-old drive for independence. Pitched battles and indiscriminate Russian bombing of the Chechen capital of Grozny caused thousands of casualties and shredded the Kremlin's credibility, but have only exacerbated the underlying constitutional crisis. Forces loyal to secessionist Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev have resisted ferociously and threaten to launch a protracted guerrilla war from the surrounding mountains if Russian firepower drives them out of Grozny.

Moscow's political establishment has virtually fallen apart under the impact of the Chechnya war. Yeltsin's most loyal constituencies, the liberal intelligentsia, mainstream news media and pro-Western business and political circles, are deserting him en masse. Surveys show the president's popularity is plummeting: 75 percent of Russians disapproved of his performance in a December poll. "Now there is a danger that the military forces and state ideologists connected with them will use this situation to take over," says Boris Altschuler, a

spokesman for the independent Moscow Human Rights Center and a longtime liberal activist.

Many scholars and analysts now admit that Yeltsin's penchant for solving political problems with brute force is the basic cause of post-Soviet Russia's swing away from the path of democracy. "We have seen the growth of a great-power state, with an authoritarian model of governing—[one that] increasingly uses the ideology of nationalism and Russian chauvinism," says Alexander Buzgalin, a democratic socialist thinker and political economist at Moscow University. "Yeltsin stands alone on the stage, his only political allies are people like [ultra-nationalist Vladimir] Zhirinovsky and [neo-fascist Gen. Alexander] Barkashov."

In the fall of 1993, Yeltsin broke the "Gordian Knot" of political gridlock in Moscow by dissolving the opposition parliament and then sending tanks to quell resistance. In the process, he deepened his dependence on Russia's traditional structures of authoritarian rule—the bureaucratic, military and security forces.

A new constitution authored by Yeltsin awarded most meaningful powers to the Kremlin. Russia's constitutional court, suspended by Yeltsin in October 1993, has yet to reappear. But this halfway-house authoritarianism has solved none of Russia's pressing contradictions. The economic nosedive continued unabated in 1994, punctuated by financial scandal and currency collapse. Despite official claims that conditions for ordinary Russians were stabilizing, government statistics showed poverty growing and unemployment sharply on the rise.

Meanwhile, Russia's still-free press enthusiastically

exposed corruption and incompetence in high places. Opposition forces have regrouped and, with confidence borne out by public opinion polls, boasted that they would sweep to power in forthcoming elections. "A war on the fringes of Russia was needed by various politicians," writes political analyst Lilia Shevtsova. "It was needed by Yeltsin to show who is master. And it was needed by the unpopular chiefs of the Defense Ministry, Interior Ministry and other power structures to bolster their shaky positions."

However, the Chechnya operation has gone badly. Instead of a swift victory that might have consolidated Yeltsin's supremacy in the Kremlin, it brought protracted conflict and mass destruction. Utterly mismanaged and increasingly unpopular, the war has done little to unify Russia's disparate bureaucratic clans. "Yeltsin has lost his liberal supporters, but the military and security bureaucrats, upon whom he now depends, hate him," says Buzgalin. "They remember him as the one who broke up the Soviet Union and initiated pro-Western policies."

Pavel Felgenhauer, a military specialist with the liberal daily *Segodnya*, warns that strains and divisions within the army are accelerating under battlefield pressures and could explode. Several top generals and Defense Ministry officials have been forced to resign over their opposition to the invasion. Troops are reluctant to fight and there is a whiff of mutiny in the air, he says. "The army's morale could break and it might just stop obeying orders. That would topple all the political structures in Russia—not just the government but constitutional order itself."

The Russian Federation is a vast administrative patchwork embracing 21 ethnic republics and 68 provinces, straining under the often painful legacies of Imperial Russia and the USSR. Although ethnic minorities make up barely 20 percent of Russia's population, they predominate in regions that comprise over 50 percent of its territory—including some of Russia's richest sources of raw materials.

"There are three criteria that describe the most explosive regional situations within the Russian Federation," says a Russian ethnographer, who asked not be identified. "First, a population with a non-Russian ethnic, religious and cultural identity. Second, historical grievances that include conquest by Russia and subsequent oppression, forced assimilation and, in some cases, much worse. Third, local deposits of natural wealth that at least suggest an independent way out of the general economic crisis of Russia as a whole."

Several territories declared some level of autonomy following the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. These included the oil-rich, mainly Muslim republic of Tatarstan in central Russia; the Muslim oil refining and industrial republic of Bashkortistan; the huge Siberian republic of Sakha-Yakutia, a cornucopia of diamonds, gold, coal and oil; the Finnish-speaking republic of Karelia, a northern land rich in minerals and forest products; and the culturally Buddhist Caspian republic of Kalmykia, which has significant deposits of oil. Only Chechnya, an oil-rich Muslim republic with a long history of resistance to Moscow, declared independence and

prepared to defend its move.

Over the past two years, most republics were persuaded by hard economic arguments and skillful Russian diplomacy to sign a new Federation Treaty with Moscow, thus establishing their willingness to divide power and property within the Russian constitution. It seemed like Yeltsin was going to fulfill his stated aim of rebuilding Russia on voluntary, democratic foundations. Then he sent tanks into Chechnya.

"By their actions in Chechnya, Russia's political leaders are initiating the destruction of the Russian Federation," says Leonid Petrovsky, a communist deputy and member of the parliament's human rights commission. Indeed, earlier this month leaders of seven restive ethnic republics—Bashkortistan, Chuvashia, Karelia, Mari-El, Mordovia, Tatarstan and Udmurtia—met to condemn Moscow's invasion of Chechnya and to demand an end to "the senseless, fratricidal war." They also called for a representative meeting of all Russia's ethnic minorities to judge the war and cut a new constitutional division of power between Moscow and the increasingly independence-minded republics.

Russia's fragile social peace could also unravel under the impact of the Chechen war. Brown-skinned Asian and Caucasian people—a small but conspicuous portion of Russian urbanites—were targeted for arrest and deportation from Moscow during an "anti-crime" drive in October 1993, and are currently bearing the brunt of special "anti-terrorist" measures in the Russian capital. "This was a kind of populist attack on Caucasian people," says Buzgalin. "It would be a terrible thing, with fearful consequences for our society, if it became a regular feature of state policy."

Yeltsin's flirtation with nationalism—implicitly identifying rebel Chechens as enemies of white, Christian Russian civilization—could reverberate across Russia. In a speech justifying the invasion of Chechnya, Yeltsin accused "Chechen clans" of being the main source of "criminal activity," "terrorism" and "political extremism" in Russia. "The situation in the Chechen Republic was having an increasingly destructive influence on stability in Russia," he said.

"Such rhetoric is unfortunate," says the ethnographer. "The effect of the words he used is to label Caucasian people as outsiders, as enemies, as sources of crime and contamination. This may seem to justify making war on them, but it could end all hope for peaceful reconciliation between the peoples of Russia."

For most Russian liberals Chechnya represents, if not the end of sunny post-Soviet dreams of Western-style freedom and prosperity, then at least another lengthy and potentially agonizing detour through a familiar Russian winter landscape. "It is difficult to be precise about social and political evolution," says Algis Prazauskas, a scholar of nationalities at Moscow's Institute of Oriental Studies. "Yet I would assert that the military intervention in Chechnya makes Russia's way to democracy a decade or two longer."

Fred Weir writes regularly from Russia for *In These Times*.

I N T H E A R T S

Shades of *Red*

**Krzysztof
Kieslowski
brings the
small details
of everyday
life to the
big screen.**

By Pat Dowell

Thwarted, misunderstood and overheard conversations form the core of Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Red*. The film begins with a close-up of a phone being dialed, but then the camera seems to leap into the wires that carry the electrical impulses through the wall, into a cable, under the sea—a thrilling ride that ends with a busy signal.

Red is the last of the Three Colors trilogy, following *Blue* and *White*, which both played in American theaters last year. The three films in the trilogy are named for the colors of the flag of France, where Kieslowski worked after leaving Poland, and each of the films reflects one of the values of the French national slogan: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—the last the theme of *Red*.

Red, which many people felt was robbed of the grand prize at the 1994 Cannes

Film Festival when the panel of judges chose *Pulp Fiction* instead, may also be the last film Kieslowski directs. He has told interviewers that he is through with the hassle of planning and financing, and after the hectic schedule of the trilogy, no wonder. He made the three films in three years, shooting one by day, editing another by night.

Maybe he's just tired; maybe he'll get over it. Let's hope so, for Kieslowski represents a kind of filmmaking that seems all but lost in Europe and virtually nonexistent in the United States. His movies are enigmatic, serene and passionately contemplative, immersed in the everyday details that our melodramatic media, in their search for ever more sensational events, routinely ignore. Kieslowski dares to make a movie in which dialing a telephone becomes a gesture deserving of the camera's full attention.

On one end of several frustrating phone calls in *Red* is Irene Jacob, the exquisitely open-faced actress who made such an impact in Kieslowski's *The Double Life of Veronique*. Here she plays a model named

Valentine. Her name is a verbal reference to the color red, in which the film is steeped. Red objects fill the screen: a book cover, a tiny bow on a television antenna in an apartment, a red Jeep driven by a young man who lives near Valentine but doesn't know her, and, most dramatically, a three-story poster featuring Valentine. She's advertising chewing gum with a look of consternation that both charms and alarms. That look will return to her face, in a different (and startling) context, as the movie ends.

Red is also, of course, the color of blood. At one point, Valentine runs over a stray dog, and when she takes the recovering animal to the address on its collar, she discovers the character with whom she will find the unlikely sort of fraternity.

Jean-Louis Trintignant, once the dapper, moody star of *The Conformist* (currently enjoying a much-deserved twenty-something anniversary re-release), plays a moody retired judge, in rumpled corduroy and two-day stubble. His only link with the world is the receiver through which he eavesdrops on his neighbors' portable phones.

He's not interested in having the dog returned. "You don't want her?" Valentine



Red
Directed by Krzysztof
Kieslowski



asks, incredulous. "I want nothing," he declares. With breathtaking pragmatism, she replies, "Then stop breathing."

There is a link between these two disparate souls that nothing rational—beyond their shared humanity—can explain. She returns, he begins to think that she needs to meet someone he "knows" (through his eavesdropping), and we begin to think it too, longing for the something that we can't quite identify.

Red is a mysterious film, infused with the very delicate and yet oceanic emotion of anticipation, which is the opposite of despair, the judge's constant state.

Kieslowski and his co-screenwriter Krzysztof Piesiewicz accomplish something very rare in *Red*; they bring the texture of everyday life to the forefront of consciousness. They focus attention on the details—the color of light at dusk, the fold of fabric, the gray muzzle of a golden dog, the warmth of a hand—that are, after all, the fundamental stuff of life for all of us.

Forgetting this material world, with its limitations and pleasures, is at the root, I often think, of much suffering and at the beginning of much exploitation.

At the end of *Red*, Kieslowski pulls the story together with a bit of lofty coincidence: a boat tragedy that seems

forced even as it makes the story turn out "right" for its characters. Familiar faces from the trilogy are seen together at last in a rescue at sea, almost as though Kieslowski were parading his cast of characters for a curtain call. It comes off as the director's wry jab at the melodrama all around him, but it is clearly intended as well to represent the sort of magical connection that is found in most of Kieslowski's films. For all its drama, the rescue seems somehow lesser than the more mundane and wondrous elements of the main character's daily routines.

Blue and *White* were both cooler films than *Red*, as befits their hues, but considering them both in the light of this sensuous and compassionate movie, they look better than they did when I first saw them. There's no doubt in my mind that Kieslowski is one of the world's great directors, and one of the last possessed with a subversive sense of the everyday and the connectedness of all flesh. Somehow, bowing out at the peak of his acclaim seems to fit the sensibility behind these films—it seems a sort of austere humility and bespeaks a self-confident disregard for the hubbub of fame. But I also suspect that Kieslowski, like Ingmar Bergman before him, will announce the end of his career more than once before the camera stops rolling. ◀

I N P R I N T

Soul men

By Mark Gauvreau Judge

At a Christmas party over the holidays I was accosted by an old friend I hadn't seen in a couple of years. He had heard through the grapevine that I had returned to the Catholic Church, and I had just come through the front door when he pounced on me. "Well, well," he sneered triumphantly, "the angry young liberal who sold out and found God." Then he asked me if I had voted Republican in the recent election.

When I informed him that, if anything, my left leanings had blossomed into full-blown democratic socialism after my return to the church, he was appalled. "So what," he demanded, "you just let everyone do whatever they want and then pray for them?"

I watched my friend stumble back to the bar and I laughed to myself, thinking how much Jim Wallis would have appreciated our exchange. My friend held the persistent—by now calcified—notion that religion and radicalism don't mix, an idea that has become gospel in the era of the religious right. Wallis has been challenging this very assumption for years. *The Soul of Politics*, Wallis' powerful new book, attempts to steal some of the right's thunder by injecting spiritual meaning back into progressive politics and, in the process, rediscovering the authentic message of Christianity and other religions.

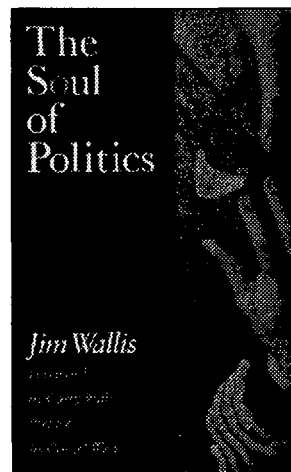
An evangelical Christian, Wallis is the founder and editor of *Sojourners*, a bimonthly magazine published in inner-city Washington, D.C., where he has lived for the last 20 years. Wallis is perhaps best known and admired as a preacher, and *The Soul of Politics* is written in a casual, rambling style reminiscent of an extemporaneous sermon. This isn't a criticism. Wallis has invested a lifetime crusading for the disenfranchised in the sewers of the world, and at the drop of a hat he can buttress his opinion with one of his personal experiences—negotiating with gangbangers in Los Angeles, reading the Bible with poor parishioners in the Philippines, touring with anti-apartheid protesters in South Africa. This lends his philosophy authority; when he says that "things

are unraveling," he's speaking as a witness.

Wallis sees the current American crisis as economic and social, but shuns traditional political solutions as unworkable. What is needed, he argues, is "prophetic spirituality," a biblical tradition of renewal that, he suggests, "has found expression in every renewal and reform movement in history" and can be expanded to include all religious and spiritual denominations. Such a spirituality demands a rejuvenation of community, personal responsibility and economic justice. "[W]e must learn to judge our social and economic choices by whether they empower the powerless, protect the Earth and foster true democracy," Wallis writes. These are elegant words, and *The Soul of Politics* is a moving testament to Wallis' vision. Unfortunately, Wallis is unlikely to get a hearing where he's needed most—in the marble halls of Capitol Hill, which is geographically close to Wallis' neighborhood but light years from its grim shadows.

Christopher Lasch also thought that America's political ideologies are inadequate to deal with social turmoil. In *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, Lasch, who died last year of cancer, comes across like a more cerebral, and more conservative, version of Wallis. We've become a nation of victims, he writes, and redemption is possible not only by correcting gross economic inequality but by dismantling the bureaucratic and therapeutic state, calling bourgeois liberalism on its double standards and rediscovering the authentic renewal of religion.

More than a political ideologue, Lasch, who was perhaps best known for his best-selling '70s jeremiad, *The Culture of Narcissism*, was a common-sense philosopher, a moral populist. In *The Revolt of the Elites*, he declares that the upper class in America—the cultural elite—is hopelessly losing touch with the rest of the country. "George Bush's wonderment, when he saw for the first time an electronic scanning device at a supermarket checkout counter," he writes, "revealed, as in a flash of lightning, the chasm that divides the privileged classes from the rest of the nation." Where social scientists once feared that the unschooled masses



The Soul of Politics

By Jim Wallis

Orbis

275 pp., \$19.95

The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy

By Christopher Lasch

Norton

260 pp., \$22

would topple the literate, civic-minded moneyed class, it is ironically the new managerial elites who have “lost faith in the values, or what remains of them, of the West.” The rise of the professional-managerial elite to power in the 20th century is itself, Lasch argues, “an important indication of the erosion of the democratic ideal, which no longer envisions a rough equality of condition but merely

ty than to the right of private decision. It will have to emphasize responsibilities rather than rights. It will have to find a better expression than the welfare state. It will have to limit the scope of the market and the power of corporations without replacing them with centralized state bureaucracy.”

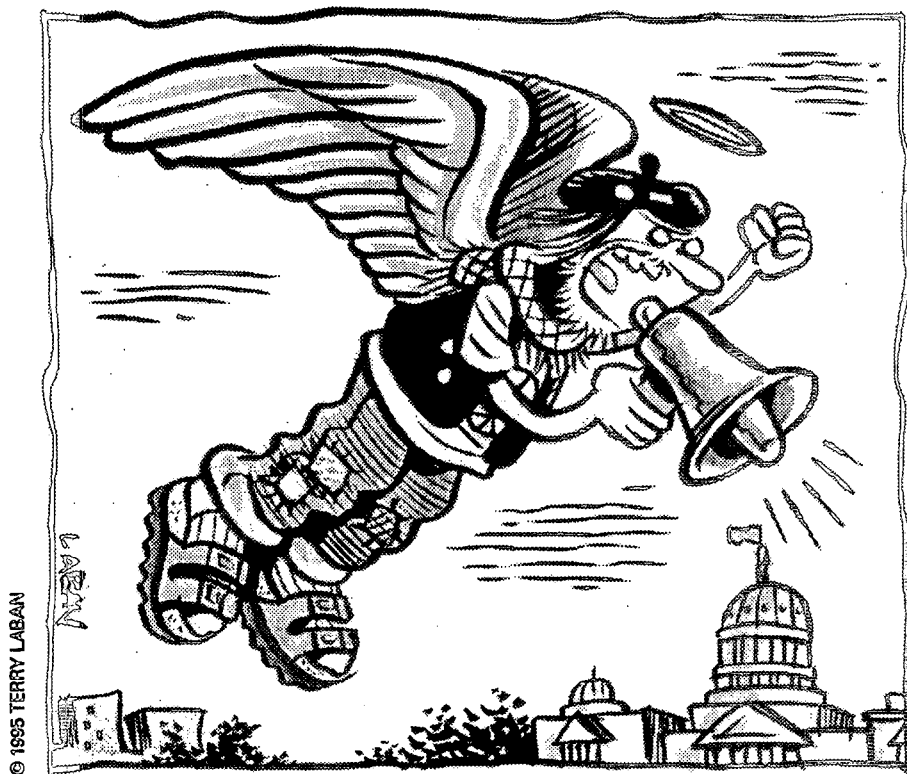
Though Lasch would have balked at the term, what he described was what I call democratic socialism. Ideally,

democratic socialism would foster civic involvement and pride by providing health care, imposing a truly progressive tax system to rebuild the cities (whose golden age Lasch romanticizes) and provide the best education in the world—an education where students are encouraged to partake in community life and debate political issues. By providing a stake in citizenship, such a system would produce an active and enlightened populace that felt plugged in to a common culture. By emphasizing education as an end in itself rather than as a means of economic advancement, true democratic socialism would help eradicate the pernicious social climbing endemic to market society. Citizens would learn early on that—as Lasch once wrote in *Sojourners*—“a democracy full of job holders is a contradiction in terms,” and that “a job is no substitute for a calling.”

Lasch, the son of a newspaper editorial writer, was an extraordinarily gifted writer. He achieves a remarkable grace

in the final pages of *Revolt of the Elites*, with his concise and commanding exploration of the tradition of religious prophecy. While secular intellectuals are admired for attacking false piety and living without “the illusion that human purposes coincide with those of God,” Lasch explains that the prophetic religious tradition has always done the same things. But where the secularists see nihilism, those with faith acknowledge “the goodness of being” and the existence of the divine despite the fact that God might not “regard human happiness as the be-all and end-all of creation.” Lasch convincingly argues that while the will of God hasn’t changed, our resentment at the fact that “the world was not made for our convenience” has reached an unprecedented intensity. “What makes the modern temper modern, then,” he concludes, “is not that we have lost our childish sense of dependence but that the normal rebellion *against* dependence is more pervasive than it used to be.” Our current crisis stems from this rebellion, which is manifest both in right-wing social and economic fantasies and in the prison house of secular “liberation.”

Mark Gauvreau Judge has written for the *Washington Post* and various magazines. He works at the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial in Washington, D.C.



the selective promotion of non-elites into the professional-managerial class.”

The elite’s gospel of social mobility as a barometer of success has, Lasch laments, helped to pave the way for the spread of market values into every aspect of contemporary social life. “[I]ndividuals cannot learn to speak for themselves at all,” Lasch writes, “much less come to an intelligent understanding of their happiness and well-being, in a world in which there are no values except those of the market ... [which] puts an almost irresistible pressure on every activity to justify itself in the only terms it recognizes: to become a business proposition, to pay its own way, to show black ink on the bottom line.” However, Lasch feels that the alternative of state bureaucracy provides a solution worse than the original problem, for “formal systems of socialization and control weaken social trust [and] undermine the willingness both to assume responsibility for oneself and to hold others accountable for their actions.” Such an approach is self-defeating, destroying the very respect for authority it sets itself up to promote.

In the end, Lasch preaches a sort of spiritual populism not that different from Wallis’: “A public philosophy for the 21st century will have to give more weight to the communi-

My dear Watsonville

By Paul Buhle

Things have recently turned very grim for both environmentalists and the environment, as anyone who followed the elections should realize. The Democrats in power were bad enough. President Clinton never mentioned the subject between Earth Days, while Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt is just about the biggest disappointment in eco-policy history, exceeded only by Al Gore. But the Republican Congress almost certainly means worse to come: dilution, if not destruction, of the Endangered Species Act; bonuses to military polluters and developers accompanied by the weakening of regulatory agencies; and an accelerated attack upon the "environmental extremists" who have the temerity to even threaten to stand in the way of petrochemical progress.



Good Liberals and Great Blue Herons: Land, Labor and Politics in the Pajaro Valley
By Frank Bardacke
Center for Political Ecology
160 pp., \$12.80

Time to get busy. But time also to stand back just a bit, and reconsider what we're doing. What else *can* we do besides flooding Congress with letters and calls, joining or rejoining our favorite environmental groups and keeping up on the latest news?

Those searching for new strategies would do well to take a look at *Good Liberals and Great Blue Herons*, a little book by Frank Bardacke about the environmental controversies in his hometown of Watsonville, Calif. Bardacke draws from columns in a sometimes radical Watsonville newspaper

as well as articles published in the always radical *Anderson Valley Advertiser* and elsewhere. A leader in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and in Vietnam War protests, Bardacke is obviously quite a character. For the last 20 years he has been active in Watsonville, the historic home of agribusiness and of agrarian struggles. Here, in the '30s, a broad coalition of Anglos, Filipinos and Mexicans took on the growers, a struggle memorialized in John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*. More recently, the United Farm Workers have fought the big companies to a standstill. Some years ago, when he was working in the fields himself, Bardacke helped introduce the long-handled hoe that the growers resisted, thus sparing thousands of Mexican-American workers a daily backache. If he had done nothing else in his life, he could have lived proudly with this single accomplishment.

Bardacke traces the history of the region in broad strokes—from the time of the Calendaruc Tribe, for centuries living on acorns, to the Slovene and Croatian immigrants who laid out the mostly blue-collar town he knows today. Although it is no longer the virgin land of the "Bird Valley" that the Indians called it, the region is not lacking in beautiful spots. Nevertheless, Bardacke can see the end of the line for Watsonville. The city now stands at a crossroads: desperate for low-cost housing, Watsonville residents must choose between the conversion of a local airport used today for recreational flying by the wealthy, or the eradication of the surviving wetlands. How can they arrive at the best resolution instead of the short-term one naturally favored by developers and greedy city fathers? Intimate knowledge of a locality may be the best counter-propaganda we have to offer.

In an interesting introduction to *Good Liberals and Great Blue Herons*, Alexander Cockburn points out that Bardacke is in a sense renewing the WPA Writers' Project of the '30s by "reading" a locality with great precision and fondness. Any number of us refugees from the '60s (or from other generations, for that matter) have been attempting to do the same thing in our chosen spots, investigating labor and architectural history, talking to old-timers, trying to inject democratic sensibility into a discourse run by politicians, bankers and their favorite builders.

A political movement we can imagine in the future would unite Watsonville's Mexican-Americans with both their Anglo neighbors and their extended families in the south. It would bring together environmentalists, labor activists, intellectuals of all kinds, feminists, gays and all good-spirited people who want to preserve the possibility of the good life and to renew hope of a future where grandchildren can live. We seem to be a very long way from the kind of universalism we need, but perhaps (as this book suggests) this goal is not quite as elusive as it looks just now. ◀

Paul Buhle has recently produced a book and a traveling photo exhibit, *Vanishing Rhode Island*, on state history and environmental issues. His biography of William Appleman Williams will appear later this year.

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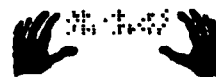
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Continued from page 40

This, I think, misses the point entirely. It is certainly true that the show lampoons New Age psychobabble, as when a teacher sings: "Men have feelings, too/ May I share mine with you/ Heal the wounded child within/ Nurture me brother, we both can win." As satire, this is crude—but only because touchy-feely gibberish tends toward unwitting self-parody. But the show is not much kinder to Mr. Buzzcut, a stentorian coach who would like nothing better than to ship them both off to reform school.

And while Beavis and Butt-Head do not read *National Review* (or anything else, for that matter) they are very enthusiastic about a TV host who closely resembles Rush Limbaugh. Invited to go on his talk show, the boys quickly reach the limits of their compatibility with the right-wing agenda. The conservative host attacks music videos for being sexually suggestive. B&B also disapprove: the scantily clad women should take *all* of their clothes off, but they don't, which sucks. Their suggestion sets off an uproar. In the midst of the chaos, Beavis exposes his rear end to the camera.

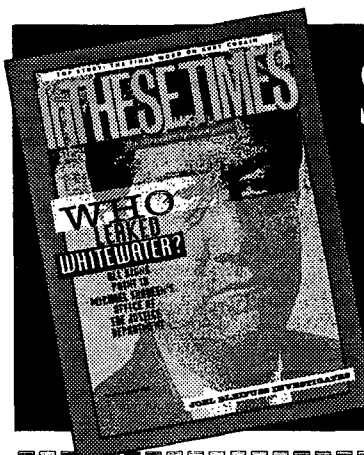
Which is not to say that Beavis and Butt-Head are exactly progressives, either. Given a chance to talk to President Clinton, they suggest he find some foreign country and set it on fire, because setting things on fire is cool. Insofar as they have any politics at all, Beavis and Butt-Head are rabidly in favor of what the late Situationist theorist Guy Debord called "the society of the spectacle"—and the gaudier, more violent and more sexually explicit the spectacle, the better.

Indeed, I suspect that Richard Brookhiser may have a fairly keen grasp on the logic of the show, despite his efforts to remake B&B in his own image as a conservative pundit. "I am astounded that the show airs on MTV," Brookhiser avers, "for the inescapable message is that people who watch MTV, or participate in the popular culture, become Beavis and Butt-Head—which is to say, amoral morons."

Yet that message, if "inescapable," is also incomplete. The program certainly makes fun of its audience, but its sense of humor also corrodes everything else it touches. *Beavis and Butt-Head* is a deeply misanthropic TV show, its satire unrelentingly mean-spirited. Practically every person in it is ugly, stupid, pompous and/or otherwise absurd. Persons disposed to extracting a moral from the show find themselves dealt with in the harshest possible terms.

Even so, I cannot help noticing that Beavis and Butt-Head were born not long before Ronald Reagan entered office. Soundbite politics and ever-shortening attention spans are all they have ever known. They cannot remember a time when MTV wasn't there, feeding them its steady stream of eye candy. They are cynics by birthright—a product, and an indictment, of their time. Or so I tell myself, laughing, each time Butt-Head's index finger completes a thorough excavation of his nostrils.

Scott McLemee writes regularly on culture and politics for *In These Times*.



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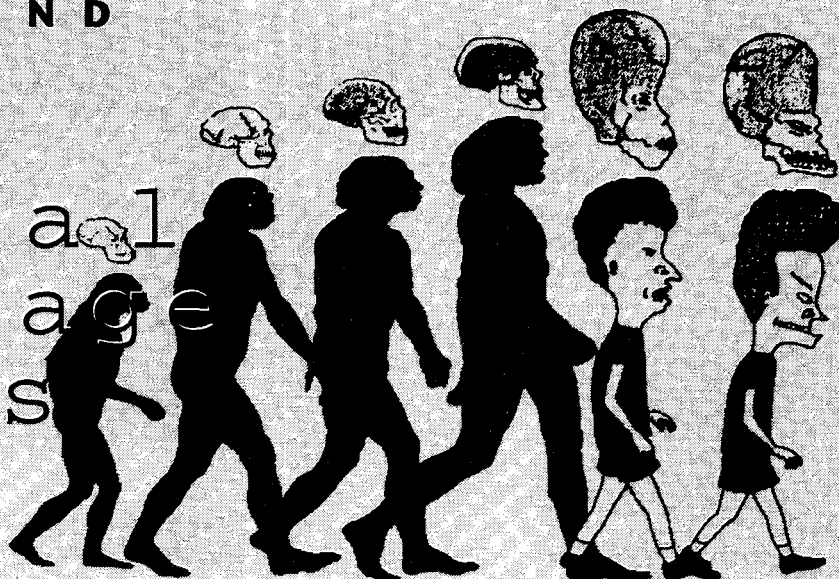
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I N T H E E N D

Global village idiots



By Scott McLeeme

Over the past several months, a friend has been supplying me with videotapes of *Beavis and Butt-Head*. Like some 14-year-old with a cache of skin magazines, I study each one with rapt fascination. Even a few minutes of the show has a marked impact—not least upon my I.Q., which instantly plunges.

Beavis farts, and I laugh. Butt-Head uses some crude but novel piece of slang; I promptly adopt it. The little monsters have a real talent for phallic and fecal puns, and I find

criminals and right-wing talk-show hosts are cool.) The rest of their vocabulary tends, like their sense of hygiene, to be minimalist.

The show's creator, Mike Judge, has insisted on keeping the animation fairly crude: the boys origi-

nated in a notebook doodle, and remain pretty grotesque. He has also been careful to preserve the show from verbal cleverness, à la *The Simpsons*. As the *New York Times* once put it, Beavis and Butt-Head "are very, very stupid." Far more than any gangsta in a rap video they might watch, the pair is a menace to society. Yet they are also much too obtuse to realize it.

WALKING THE LOG

PUD WRESTLING

myself cultivating a knack for them, too. Watching the show is a guilty pleasure. And, indeed, a solitary vice: my wife leaves the room as soon as it comes on.

Anybody who hasn't seen the program by now has probably been deliberately avoiding it; the duo are almost inescapable. They split their time between actively anti-social behavior (e.g., trashing the BurgerWorld where they work) and the more passive satisfactions of channel-surfing. They have distinctive and incessant laughs: Beavis' is a

DISHONORABLE DISCHARGE

raspy "heh-heh-heh," while Butt-Head's is a deeper "huh-huh." They judge both life and MTV videos according to a strictly binary code of values: things are either cool or they suck. (Pretentious rock bands, for instance, suck; while

To quite a few people, the show itself represents a threat—as though with each new episode Western Civilization were sinking a few inches deeper into the mire. So it was amusing last summer to find a right-wing

columnist, Richard Brookhiser of *The National Review*, describing the program as "the most concentrated and savage dose of cultural conservatism in general circulation."

Upon watching a couple of episodes, Brookhiser noticed that jokes were made "at the expense of B.&B.'s teachers, '60s types ... who try to make the pair more sensitive. Good luck. ... They are the death of all facile hopes, maybe of all hope. When we teach self-esteem, these are the selves we encourage."

Continued on page 39